

Space in *The English Patient*

By

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Chapter 1. Introductory comments

Introduction

This thesis is going to deal with fiction and film, and the work I have chosen to analyse is *The English Patient*, book and film. I will try to explore how the written and the visual media present significant constituent aspects of space in the two works of art. The phenomenon I am particularly interested in is space. The aim of this thesis is to examine space and problems associated with, and prompted by, this term. However, many topics are related to the concept of space. It is not a simple term; it is highly complex and comprehensive.

Space can be compared to the meaning it has in our daily language. It can be a country, a city within the country, a house within the city, a room inside the house, a box in the room, and so forth. Space conveys many layers of meanings. One can interpret and attribute characteristics to the protagonists (also to the narrator and author) in accordance to the space they are placed within. Such a topographical definition of space makes it adaptable to the real world. However, it is also applicable in fictional work, such as *The English Patient*. It is related to narrative theory, as it is a location in which to place the protagonists, the narrator(s), and the author. Once space moves away from its physical context, it becomes a metaphorical concept, which is applicable to any abstract source. A text or a fragment may have an intertextual or deterritorialized space. In other words, space is not just a location that can be mapped or measured; it also includes an abstract dimension, such as literary features, thoughts, and mental patterns. This thesis aims to explore the issues that arise when examining space as presented in *The English Patient*. I will discuss how space is executed and created. I will also consider its functions, and the impact this has upon the characters.

Space as a literary and filmic phenomenon is created and used in a number of different ways. In order to analyse these issues further, it is important to clarify the term space. It is

also necessary to give a brief introduction to the terms: adaptation, narrative theory, and postcolonialism, in order to provide a contextual frame for *The English Patient*. I will also give an account of my method. But before I start doing so, I find it important to introduce Michael Ondaatje, the author, as well as the book in question. I will also give an account of Minghella and his adaptation of *The English Patient*. These introductory surveys will be presented section-wise, as the intention is to create a background for the examination of space in *The English Patient*.

Michael Ondaatje

The role of a camera is to capture the light and movement of a moment onto film; the role of an author is to capture the immensity of life's moments onto text. Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje attempts such mystical conjuration in both his prose and poetic prints, while still remaining true to the rhythms of the geographic peoples he mimics in his narratives. (Chandler)

Michael Ondaatje was born on 12 September 1943 in Colombo, Sri Lanka (former Ceylon). His father was a tea and rubber-plantation superintendent, but unfortunately also afflicted with alcoholism. Due to his addiction, his mother left her husband in 1954. She wanted to start a new life and decided to immigrate to England, where Michael was enrolled at Dulwich College. In the early sixties they moved to Canada, where Michael received his B.A. at the University of Toronto and his M.A. at Queen's University. Michael started teaching at a University in Ontario and is now a member of the Department of English at York University, Toronto; a position he has held since 1971. He also edits the literary journal *Brick* together with his wife Linda Spalding in addition to being a writer.

Writing poetry and fiction, momentarily clutching his Asian heritage then spinning it off like a jitterbug partner, Ondaatje and his imagination can leap continents in a single paragraph. (Chandler)

Ondaatje is a major postcolonial writer with strong connections both to the East and to the West. His multicultural background has made him into an interesting intersection of cultures. His humorous yet gripping novel, *Running in the Family*, describes his family life, real and imagined, and gives an account of how it is to be born in former Ceylon, having Dutch/Indian ancestry, and being raised in London in order to become a Canadian citizen. Ondaatje has won many awards for his fiction and poetry, but his breakthrough as a writer came in 1992, the year he won the prestigious Booker Prize for *The English Patient*, which was later made into the Academy Award-winning film in 1996. What is it about this book that so easily captivates its readers? Let me introduce a summary of this highly intriguing novel.

The English Patient

One of the most remarkable aspects of Ondaatje's work is the fashion in which he juxtaposes and blends the media of poetry and prose, making reading an almost multi-media function while remaining on the printed page. (Chandler)

I certainly agree with this statement as *The English Patient* is a work of art which artistically and elegantly mixes the genres of prose and poetry. This masterful ability makes it almost impossible not to dwell upon every sentence and paragraph in *The English Patient*.

I began *The English Patient* by reading a non-fiction book about a spy who goes across the desert during World War II. A friend on mine had told me about a spy her father was tracking in Cairo. Read this book called *The Cat and the Mice*, she said. There was Ken Follett's novel too - *The Key to Rebecca* – based on the spy's adventures. But in the non-fiction work it was the man who guided the spy across the desert who seemed to be much more interesting than the spy, though there were only a few lines describing him. And I knew, like Billy Wilder did, that *this* was the guy I wanted to write about ... and this was Almásy. I was not really interested in a spy story, I was interested in Almásy's character, but also wanted the drama of the spy story to hover on the horizon as I wrote. (Ondaatje 2002: 165, original emphases)

The plot takes place in 1944 and the war in central Italy is over, leaving behind a landscape of ruined villas and towns. A young Canadian nurse, Hana - almost destroyed by the cruelty of war, which caused the death of her father and her boyfriend - stays behind in an isolated

Tuscan villa. Her only company is her patient, a man burned beyond recognition, who is constantly drifting in and out of his own memories and dreams. Into their lives comes Caravaggio, a thief who used to know Hana and her father, and Kip, a young Sikh whose profession as a sapper leads him to the desolated villa. At the Villa San Girolamo, Ondaatje's four protagonists carry on an intensely personal existence, as they play out their interior drama.

Hana seems to suppress her anxiety and worries by nursing her English patient. Although she is a hard-working woman, she makes time to read in the evenings. Reading becomes a way of survival for her as it enables her to escape from the realities of life. It does not seem as if she is aware of the danger she is in, living in a mined place. She seems to believe she is cursed, as all the people she falls in love with, or cares for, die. Despite her fear, she falls in love with Kip and initiates a relationship with him.

Kip was born in India, and educated in England, and his character is deeply coloured by this multi-national past. Kip mostly keeps to himself, as seems to be accordance to the nature of sappers. Despite his apparent voluntary solitude, he has an affair with Hana and enjoys spending time with the patient. As readers we are introduced to the time he spent in England, as a trainee, and to his family in India.

The English patient, slowly dying due to his severely burned body, is reduced to an existence where he switches between consciousness and a dreamlike state. He slowly reveals his past as his mind wanders off, back into his well of memories. These remembrances mostly revolve around the time he spent in the desert as an explorer, mapping the desert, and his passionate relationship with his lover, Katharine. His past is closely linked to his commonplace book, which contains fragments of all the events we are told of. He keeps this book with him at all times, and it is an important tool in the understanding of his character.

The patient, also called Almásy, takes up much of the narrative space in the novel, and especially in the film, as is signalled by its title, *The English Patient*.

Caravaggio is a Canadian thief who is tortured during the war by the Germans. He swears he will track down whoever revealed his identity. This is why he shows up at the villa. Caravaggio drugs the patient with morphine in order to make him admit to being Almásy, a notorious spy working for General Rommel. In the end he succeeds in doing so, but by this time Almásy has told his reasons for helping the Germans, and Caravaggio chooses to learn how to forgive instead of avenging his unfortunate past.

The different protagonists' narratives go on simultaneously, although they differ in both location and time. One major part of the novel is life at the villa, which is also the narrative frame of the story. This is the space where all the characters are situated physically. Hana is surviving through her daily tasks, which are only interrupted by the English patient and Kip, a man that fascinates her and opens her up. He makes her dare to love again. Time goes by and their lives become marked by a daily routine, until they are told of the atomic bomb. This shocks Kip to the bone and results in him freezing Hana out and attacking Almásy for the evil deed of the west. In the end he leaves for Florence and Almásy requests euthanasia of Hana, which he is granted.

The narrative switches between the different protagonists and moves back and forth in time. Another major part, which is of the past, is the love story between Almásy and Katharine Clifton, the wife of his colleague Geoffrey Clifton. This story, told by Almásy, takes place years before the narrative frame. Katharine betrays her husband and becomes Almásy's secret lover. This affair ends after a while, which makes Almásy mad of longing. He used to be a calm man of few words and did not believe much in women's compelling power. Katharine makes him feel alive, yet at the same time she introduces him to pain. When Katharine's husband finds out about their previous affair he becomes so jealous that he

decides to kill them all. On his way to pick up Almásy in the desert he crashes the plane, killing himself, and leaving his wife dying. Almásy tries to save her by laying her down in the coolness of a cave and walks through the desert alone to get help. Due to his Dutch / Hungarian name the Allies think he is German, so they arrest him instead of helping him. Time goes by, and in his desperation of reaching Katharine, he hands over his maps to the Germans in return of a plane, and manages to get back to the cave where he left his lover, three years too late. He places her body in the plane and flies through the desert. At this point they are shot down and Almásy hereby becomes the burnt patient kept alive by Bedouins and later by Hana.

In this summary, I have introduced three areas of space. Much of this thesis focuses on the topographical characteristics of the Villa San Girolamo and the desert. But it will also examine the metaphorical space, especially that of the commonplace book. I wish to continue my discussion of these distinct areas of space by introducing influential theorists that have relevant and explanatory theories on the subject of space.

Space

I will discuss the subject of space by referring and quoting several influential theories. These theories are all important for a further discussion of space in *The English Patient*, and of relevance to my analysis. Jakob Lothe distinguishes between two forms of space. One is story space, which is ‘the space containing events, characters, and the place or places of the action as it is presented and developed in the discourse’ (Lothe 2000: 50). The reader is able to construct stories in his/her mind on the basis of such a space. This is transferable to the Villa San Girolamo, where all the characters are located and where significant parts of the action occur. The other is discourse space, which is the narrator’s space. This space can be created and developed in many different ways and it does not have to be indicated in the text

at all. One example is the character Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow tells the story on board his vessel on the Thames. He becomes a frame narrator who is easily forgotten as he seldom explicitly comes forward in the story space (Conrad 1995). As a result: the borders between these highly distinguishable spaces become blurred. They move closer to each other. *The English Patient* also has a discourse space, a space the protagonists cannot enter. This space is out of their reach, as it is a space created by the observer for the observer. One example where the narrator defines his/her territory in *The English Patient*, and thus creates a discourse space, is when Hana is described as 'a woman I don't know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life' (301). The use of discourse space creates an outer frame, perhaps on a macro level. It would be fruitful to compare the effect this has with that of the villa in the novel, which works as a frame for the story perhaps on a micro level.

The narrator seems to be wary of appearing in the story space. But it is possible to spot him/her, and this creates a dual feeling. As readers we are not the only ones peeking into the lives of these characters. The narrator too observes them. When it comes to the relationship between Hana and Kip, the narrator states: 'How much she is in love with him of he in her we don't know' (127). We, the narrator and the readers, are all spectators. We are situated at the same location, observing the characters and the plot taking place at the villa. The narrator narrates according to what he/she sees. The narrator, as well as the readers, are unable to interrupt or change the course of events.

The distinction Lothe makes of space is potentially useful as it helps to reveal layers of narrative. It is important to identify such layers of narration in order to see how space is incorporated within the text. One thing is to recognize the places being described to us in the text; another thing is to see the space that is created by a frame narrator. Lothe's distinction

helps to clarify the multi-layered issue of space, and it makes it possible to define the elements of space in more detail.

An important aspect of space is that we cannot study or identify this term without the consciousness of being, or of the unavoidable limitations of being. Space can be seen as an instrument we use in order to identify and study. Our states of being, and space, are interlinked and cannot be separated. Immanuel Kant states that it 'is not possible for mankind to imagine that there is no space, although one can easily imagine that there is no object within it' (quoted in Lothe 2003: 77). Hence space is understood through the association of the elements described, and it can only be fully understood through its perceptibility.

A theorist strongly influenced by Kant is Frederik Tygstrup. He too claims that space, as a literary term, has a starting-point in the real world. Tygstrup finds that we are only able to understand space through our perception and experience of the real world. Space, as a literary term, is created through interaction between the space of experience and the space of the text's meaning. This makes the typographical space of the villa and of the desert more easily graspable. We all have knowledge, or even experience, from such areas. This makes it possible for us to relate to these locations. Tygstrup goes on to state that as readers we grasp the concept of space through elements that are expressed within the text, such as action, sensing, thinking, and feeling. Description of the specific space where the action takes place is of less importance. It is what is expressed and conveyed through the notion of space that counts. Descriptive thoughts, actions, remembrances, and so forth, can lead to such a perception. London is a space that has been described in so many different ways, one would think there were a number of different capitals called London. Virginia Woolf and Salman Rushdie describe a vibrating and multicultural London, while Charles Dickens presents a cold and withdrawn capital. As readers we are able to adapt to these different perceptions through experience in our real life. Thus the understanding of space cannot be objective. Our reading

is highly subjective, because we perceive the text according to our own experiences, and not least our perception of space.

Tygstrup stresses that every type of space has a starting-point in a chain of relations. The many relations within the text are organized through a certain consistency and create a tool, which makes it possible to perceive the presence of space. It is only possible to create a space-like picture in our mind due to the creation of relations caused by what is mentioned explicitly and implicitly. I broadly agree with Tygstrup's view of space, and my analysis is aided by his theories. But there are also other theorists whose views I find inspiring and useful in relation to this thesis. One of them is Bjarne Markussen.

Markussen states that the literary term space has a wider meaning than it has as a mathematical or geometrical term. Space as a literary term has to do with dimensions in human life. Like Lothe, Markussen stresses the link between space and time. He says time is a part of any space, and that space exists in time. In other words, the two terms depend on each other, which makes it hard to understand one without understanding the other. I will as far as possible try to avoid bringing in the notion of time, since time is a term that, if properly considered, would easily fill a thesis of its own. In short, Markussen states that within literature we do not only come across space as an area that can be measured or mapped thanks to the cardinal points. Space also consists of the 'lived' space, which includes certain moods and choices, the space where certain features come into focus and others stay behind.

Markussen finds that space can function both literally and as a metaphorical term. This is a distinction that is frequently used in this thesis, as it is highly relevant for my division of the villa, the desert, and the commonplace book. A housing is something material, a house made up of walls and roof, while for example space of consciousness is a metaphorical term used to denote abstract things such as thoughts and mental patterns. But is it not human customs that apply qualities such as 'a housing' to a literal space, such as a

house? The space of the Villa San Girolamo illustrates my point. This is a residence with missing walls and roof, features that usually qualify a house as a housing. But we still get an impression that it is a house, thanks to Hana, who cleans, cooks, repairs, and makes it liveable. Markussen also states that the space of consciousness will only be perspicuous when we get an appearance of something physical. That is when the abstract thought can be created; hence space is created through the interplay between the material aspect of the literal meaning and the metaphorical meaning furthered by conscious thought. When analysing space, Markussen mostly focuses on things and places the way they are described within the text. Relation, between material and abstract things, is a key word in his analysis. He claims space is a relation of things, which come into being through the interplay of things and consciousness. For example: social space can denote human interpersonal relations, which include both material and cultural relationships.

Another theorist whose views I share is Syed Manzuru Islam. In order to fully explain the notion of space, Islam goes all the way back to the time of Hippocrates, who 'ascribed to space the key to cultural difference' (Islam 1996: 6). Islam connects space to travel, which is a relevant aspect of *The English Patient*. Travel is a movement between spatial locations, and this is applicable to all the protagonists as they are all in one way or another on the move. Their presence at the villa is only temporarily, they are all heading for another destination. Such spatial arrival and departure 'stages the threshold to be crossed' (Islam 1996: 5) and this threshold symbols what is between, divides and joins spatial locations. I believe Islam introduces a very interesting element when it comes to the examination of space. Crossings, thresholds, what is between, borders, and boundaries, are key words when discussing the notion of travel, and especially when it comes to analysing *The English Patient* and its varied use of space. Such issues are also relevant to the novel when viewed from a postcolonial angle, something I will come back to later in this chapter

The French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard, has written a book suitably entitled *The Poetics of Space, the Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. Bachelard claims that the creation of identity comes as a natural result of understanding space. This effect is closely linked to when and how we are placed in space. This makes space an important factor when analysing the issue of identity in *The English Patient*. The protagonists are strongly affected by their surroundings. And the space they are placed within reveal some of their characteristics. Like Markussen, Bachelard makes a distinction between different types of space: literal and metaphorical. He particularly emphasises the literal space of the house. Of all kinds of spaces – physical, personal, official, international, or universal - the house is the most significant to humans. It is the first space most of us can remember and it is within the walls of the house we first start to create and seek our own identity (Bachelard 1994). Homi Bhaba voices a similar view as he introduces the term ‘liminal space’. He has exploited ‘the house’ since this is a space all humans are familiar with. He focuses on the stairwell, which can be seen as an in-between space. This is the area connecting rooms, and has no further function than constructing the difference between upper and lower. He believes this space is of great significance when examining the concept of identity, which I will analyse further in chapter two.

It is also important to mention the Russian theorist Michael Bakhtin and his view on the issue of space. His view is closely linked with that of Bhaba, as he too is concerned with the cronotopic motif of the elements of space. These are spaces within or between other spaces that can be identified, such as corridors, and thresholds. Such areas of transition are free and open; they do not belong to anyone and cannot be categorized. There are many such spaces within *The English Patient*, especially the Villa San Girolamo, as this is a villa that has been bombed to ruins during the war. Many of its indoor spaces have become thresholds,

leading nowhere and anywhere at the same time. I will further analyse the linkage between the space of the villa and the character's identity in the preceding chapter.

Having introduced the novel, its author, and the phenomenon this thesis is based upon, I feel it is appropriate to move on to the adaptation of *The English Patient* and the man behind the film.

Minghella and his adaptation of *The English Patient*

Anthony Minghella was fascinated with *The English Patient* after reading the first pages. He believed the novel had 'the deceptive appearance of being completely cinematic. Brilliant images [were] scattered across its pages in a mosaic of fractured narratives, as if somebody had already seen the film and was in a hurry trying to remember all the best bits (Minghella 1997: xiii). Minghella had little knowledge about the Second World War, the desert, or about Tuscany, and decided to borrow a cottage far away from civilization to study and create ideas. Making the screenplay was not an easy process. He felt strongly for all parts of the novel and had a hard time narrowing it down. But all the changes were 'made in the spirit of translating his beautiful novel to the screen. [Minghella] was determined and encouraged to have [his] say about the people and events described in the book, and was obliged to make transparent what was delicately oblique in the prose' (Minghella 1997: xv). He contacted Saul Zaentz, a film-producer, in order to get feedback and comments. Zaentz fell for the idea at once and, along with Michael Ondaatje, they both contributed greatly to the screenplay. They did not want the adaptation of *The English Patient* to be a dutiful version of the book. 'None of us wanted just a faithful echo' (Minghella 1997: viii). They found it very hard to eliminate scenes 'that sparkled and glistened but which did not fit the dramatic time lines of a film' (Minghella 1997: viii). It is easier to include scenes in a book since this is a medium that allows longer arms. Books can more easily include narratives that break with a chronological

order. They are physically available for the reader to read over and over. A certain degree of order is usually demanded of film, since this is a media normally perceived momentarily.

One widely discussed example that was left out in the film is Kip's stay in England.

Minghella actually wrote and recorded Kip's life in England, but, as Ondaatje states in an interview

[...] when we looked at it later, we realized that we had written this little half-hour movie in England in the middle of this one, which the movie would never recover from. Not because it was bad or even weak; in fact it was quite wonderful. But you can't have a diversion for 20 minutes while Kip trains in England. You have so many flashbacks already – to have another one in England would have been too much. (Kamiya 1996)

Thus, 'time spent on that flashback would have diverted the audience from the main plot for too long, and seeing Kip's bomb defusing work would have held no tension because we would know he had survived' (Minghella 1997: viii).

Minghella wrote the script in cooperation with both Saul and Ondaatje. During the process of filming even the actors came forth with their own ideas. They all contributed with their own interpretations, hence the 'territories and maps [of the movie became] blurred as to what [was] new, what was [Ondaatje's], what was Anthony's, what was Saul's or Ralph Fiennes' (playing the English patient), or Juliette Binoche's (playing Hana), what was Walter Murch's. You have a communal story made by many hands' (Minghella 1997: ix).

Michael Ondaatje has a unique gift of writing with a fascinating and intriguing lyrical style. This observation also applies to Minghella, who converts Ondaatje's lyricism into visual poetry. One can easily dwell upon a scene in his film in the same way as one dwells upon a sentence or phrase in Ondaatje's novel. Unsurprisingly, the film became a huge success, resulting in nine Academy Awards, including Best Picture. The most striking aspect of Minghella's *The English Patient* is its photography, which is superb on both the endless scale of the desert and on the intimacy of the human face.

The movie is made up of ‘layers of montage, bricolage, multiple viewpoints, time shifts, and a dazzling cinematography and music’ (Murray 1997). It has a circular structure, beginning and ending with the same scene. It shows a plane flying over the desert. A hymn is being sung as we see the peaceful and pale face of a woman in the plane along with a man, flying above the soft sand dunes of the Saharan desert. In the opening scene the plane is suddenly shot down and years later, in 1944 Italy, we are introduced to a badly burned patient. The narrative tells of the burned patient and the nurse taking care of him, until we are set in the narrative frame of the Villa San Girolamo. This is the space where the film moves back into the past through dreams and flashbacks of Almásy, and also the other protagonists. The patient’s memories come flooding back as he is questioned and drugged by Caravaggio. The film strongly focuses on the fragmented memories of Almásy, who easily flip-flops between the present and a period during the late thirties and early forties.¹ Life taking place in the narrative frame is not allowed as much time and intimacy as it is in the book. The relationship between Hana and Kip lacks the intensity found in the romance between Almásy and Katharine. This is caused by the fact that neither of them has a fully developed character in the film, which has resulted in critique about these scenes being too lengthy, thus becoming unwanted interruption. Their characters are starved of dimension, yet given enough screen time to promise a great deal more. What causes the differences between a literary work and its adaptation? Is it possible to transfer all features of a text onto screen?

To ‘“transfer’ a work of art from one medium to another is in one sense impossible’ (Lothe 2000: 86). I agree with this statement as the text and film are created differently and also have a different aesthetic effect. The concept of space illustrates my point as it is created through visualization in our minds when we read a novel, and presented to us when we watch

¹ The film has a stronger focus on the English patient while the novel focuses on all the characters situated at the villa. I will come back to this in chapter 4.

a movie. This makes it clear that space is developed differently in the two media, both when it comes to creation, representation, and reception.

Adaptation can be explained as taking a literary work and translating it into filmic language. Space presented in writing demands internal visualization by the individual reader, which results in as many variations of a space as there are readers. Hence, the most striking difference between space in novels and space in film is the fact that film visualizes the space on our behalf (and everything within it). The cinema audience is, as the Russian formalist Boris Eikhenbaum stressed as early as 1926,

placed in completely new conditions of perception, which are to an extent opposite to those of the reading process. Whereas the reader moves from the printed word to visualisation of the subject, the viewer moves in the opposite direction: he moves from the subject, from comparison of the moving frames to their comprehension, to naming them, in short, to the construction of internal speech. The success of film is partly connected to this new and heretofore undeveloped kind of intellectual exercise. (Eikhenbaum 1973: 123)

The director has to present characters, events, and characterizations to the viewer. This makes it very hard and time consuming for the director to find the perfect space, since this space is the only possibility presented to the viewers. Film presents events, characters, and characterizations as definite, since they are visually presented to us. The film *shows* the viewer characters and places. No space is left for individual visualization. It is a unique medium in the way it can also *show* action and audibly present speech.

[...] a film can *show* [external features] with sovereign conviction. Moreover, a film can easily combine external features with characterizing patterns of speech and action [...]. [...] a film cannot convey a character's thoughts, feelings, plans, and so forth in the way fictional literature can – partly because the film narrator's functions are so unlike those of the literary narrator. (Lothe 2000: 86)

Having introduced Minghella's adaptation of *The English Patient*, I would like to move on to an aspect that are both relevant to the film and the novel. Who, or what, provides us with the knowledge we need in order to visualize a text as we read, and that also presents the film? One answer to this is the narrative, which is the one (or the ones) telling the story.

Narrative theory is important for an understanding of how the novel and film is intentionally presented. Knowledge of narrative theory is also important in the further analysis of *The English Patient*, book and film, in this thesis.

Narrative Theory

In order to adequately understand the novel and the film, certain knowledge of narrative theory is needed. I will therefore give a short introduction to this very interesting field of study. I agree with Jakob Lothe that narrative theory ‘is [best] understood as a tool for analysis and interpretation – a necessary aid to a better understanding of narrative texts through close reading’ (Lothe 2000: 9). Lothe explains that the author is someone who creates a fictional world (or a story plot), within which he/she places a narrator (or several narrators). This is an important point with a view to our text. *The English Patient* (book and film) has several narrators that narrate the story. The narrative may be told in both third person and first person. A third person narrative indicates that the narrator does not participate in the story being told, thus indicating that a first person narrator is a participant within the plot. The narrators of *The English Patient* participate, as they are protagonists within the story plot that narrate the different stories (Gaasland 1999: 28). Almásy, Hana, Kip, and Caravaggio are all important characters who tell their own stories. A result of such oscillating narrative is that we as readers and viewers gain a more intimate relationship with each of the protagonists.

There are two ways of obtaining information about the characters. One way is through the narrator. A third-person narrator knows everything about the characters in the plot. But he/she may choose to withhold information. A first-person narrator has a natural limitation of his/her knowledge of the others. It is impossible for a first-person narrator to know how the

other characters think and feel, unless such information is given to them.² As a reader, one should especially question a first-person narrative's trustworthiness. The second source of obtaining information about the characters is the characters themselves. The way they express themselves (through descriptions of clothing, speech and thoughts) may reveal information unavailable to other characters. But it is also important to keep in mind that other characters may distort our perceptions of a character by interrupting the narrative with their own thoughts and opinions (Gaasland 1999: 96-97).

The narrative of *The English Patient* (book and film) has positioned itself 'between cultures and nations, theories and texts [...], the past and the present [...]' (Bhaba 2002: 4). How then does narrative apply to film? 'A film holds us firmly in the optical illusion that images displayed in rapid succession come to life' (Lothe 2000: 11). *The English Patient* has an engrossing narrative. Minghella comments on the fact that one should not have more than one person having a flashback.

If all four of the characters start having flashbacks, as they do in the book, it will get too confusing. My rule of thumb is that there are two ways to deal with multiple points of view in a film: divergent or convergent. [...] divergent method is when you start with all the characters in the same time and space – an Aristotelian structure. After that you can follow them individually wherever they go – as long as you've seen them all together at one point' [...]. The other approach is convergent: two or three stories that start separately and then flow together. *The English Patient* is a good example. It starts out with two mysterious figures in a plane, flying across the desert. The plane gets shot down by the Germans and then – *cut* – you're on a train, with a young woman, a nurse, in a completely different situation [...]. (Ondaatje 2002: 251-254, original emphases)

The English Patient has all the protagonists placed physically at the villa. After a while the narrative follows each one wherever they go, in time and space. By having the characters placed at the same location, we can observe them in relation to one another. We see how they interrelate, how they carry themselves, and behave. If this is done well in a film, it can present different points of view without disturbing the audience. By using what Minghella

² Katharine is a character who is not given a narrative of her own. We only hear about her through Almásy. She is not assigned her own space, and what we learn about her are only perceptions made by Almásy.

calls a divergent narration, the reader or spectator is reassured that the different stories (that at first seem to have nothing to do with each other), at some point intersect. This happens at the beginning of *The English Patient* when the patient is being interrogated and Hana gives him a glass of water. We are given a clear hint that their stories will merge.

Minghella believes one should only include two characters with their own stories and flashbacks, and certainly not include any other story halfway through the film. Yet this is exactly what happens in *The English Patient* as Caravaggio is introduced and given the space required to bring forth his own story. Minghella says that ‘Well, rules are there to be broken. (Laughs)’ (Ondaatje 2002: 255). In other words, there are no clear-cut rules when it comes to narrative in film or literature. Rules can be stretched and new rules can be invented along the way. Having introduced narrative theory, which is an important critical tool when discussing *The English Patient*, it is time to move on to the historical context it originates in.

Postcolonialism

If one thinks of postcolonialism in its original meaning, as domination due to direct rule, it appears after colonialism and imperialism. The term ‘postcolonialism’ was first used in the 1950s and 1960s and ‘postcolonial studies’, earlier called Commonwealth literature, has become an important field of study in universities all around the world. ‘The postcolonial is a dialectical concept that marks the broad historical facts of decolonisation and the determined achievement of sovereignty’ (Young 2001: 57). But postcolonialism also points out that people and nations even today live in a new imperialist context of economic and political domination. Postcolonialism, as a field of study, is not created due to the new world system; it is rather a response to its condition. Postcolonial theory is mostly developed in countries of the West. It is important to keep in mind that the west is not homogeneous. Leading theorists of postcolonial theory include Homi Bhabha, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, and Edward W. Said, who

come from colonised countries, and who have worked for extended periods in the western academy. This makes it more difficult as a reader to know where the author *is* when reading a book. The geographical aspect is not of great importance, but rather the author's standpoint, where they 'locate themselves as speaking from, epistemologically, culturally, and politically, who they are speaking to, and how they define their own enunciative space' (Young 2001: 62). Homi Bhaba states that the 'truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision' (Bhaba 2002: 5). It is in 'the *in-between* spaces [that] the meaning of culture [and] authority [is] negotiated' (Bhaba 2002: 4, original emphasis). These writers are located in-between two different worlds, that of the Self and that of the Other.

Postcolonial theory discusses the ideological heritage of colonialism in the decolonised countries and in the west. It operates through the dimension of time and space; it reorders the world through knowledge from the colonised countries' lingering entanglement with the dominating west. This knowledge is obtained through its colonial and anti-colonial past, the postcolonial present, emigration, immigration and forced migration, nomadism and settlement (Young 2001: 57-69). These phenomena have a strong effect on people's identity. Identity is a major postcolonial theme, and is presented in a number of different ways in *The English Patient*. Kip represents a colonial past and a postcolonial present in the novel. His identity falls in-between his Indian origin and his devotion to the country that educated him.

Homi Bhaba claims that the creation and building of identity happens through placing oneself between binary categories. In other words, identity is often constructed when placing oneself within opposites, such as Black – White, known – alien, self – other, dark – light, Indian origin – Western origin, and so forth. Kip admires the West for its supremacy. Yet, as the atomic bomb is dropped in the East, he is appalled by the way the West arrogantly rules the world with an iron hand. It becomes inevitable for him not to reflect upon such binary opposites, as he starts to seek his own location.

Travel is an important keyword when it comes to the conflicting issue of identity. Travel inevitably leads to the questioning of many postcolonial issues. Syed Manzurul Islam defines travel as a phenomenon where one moves from one place and to another. In other words, it is composed of a movement between spatial locations, one has to leave a spatial marker and arrive at another (Islam 1996: vii). Islam divides travel into two categories: nomadic travel and sedentary travel. I believe this is a very fruitful, yet problematic, categorization of travel. Nomadic travel is a part of life; it becomes a way of living. It has to do with ‘encounters with otherness that fracture both a boundary and an apparatus of representation: it is a performative enactment of becoming-other’ (Islam 1996: vii). Sedentary travel, on the other hand, ‘involves a movement across geographical and textual space, but [...] settles for a representational practise that scarcely registers an encounter with the other’ (Islam 1996: viii). Hence a sedentary traveller is a person that does not *want* to see what is in front of him. Perceptions have been made beforehand and there is neither will nor a wish to verify or falsify. Such a traveller is more a traveller of leisure, not a traveller who seeks to understand and learn. A sedentary traveller ‘burdened as they are by the need to establish essential difference on a binary frame and to capture otherness in knowledge, obsessively bring into existence a rigid boundary which separates them from the other’ (Islam 1996: viii). Both Hana and Almásy are wandering characters that undergo a nomadic travel. Their stay at the villa is only temporarily (although Almásy is to die there), but during the course of the story they both seem to restore peace and settle.

Borders, belonging, identity, and attitudes towards different cultures are issues associated with Islam’s bipartite division of travel. These issues are of great importance within postcolonialism, as well as in the understanding and reading of *The English Patient*, and is further analysed in the preceding chapters.

Another postcolonial theme not yet mentioned is deterritorialization.

... water is an alien element in the desert, not belonging to its territory, ... it seems that the desert as a waterless place has been deterritorialized by the traces of history. Water floods in. Fire, on the other hand, is what has deterritorialized the patient's skin, making it black instead of white. (Schimanski 2001: 131)

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are two philosophers who first introduced the term deterritorialization. Schimanski explains this term as a 'shifting in physical territories [and] a denial of what is proper to a book, or to a person and indeed a denial of the area of meaning proper to any word' (Schimanski 2001: 130). When perceiving the commonplace book as a place with a defined territory the ambiguity of its borders become an inevitable element to question. The book has undergone a process of deterritorialization, which makes it possible to perceive it as a space on its own. I will elaborate this view further when discussing the metaphorical space.

Since this thesis is based on the literary work of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, this novel is given the main focus. I will analyse the novel through close reading. But I will also go into detail of different scenes in Minghella's adaptation. I will support my discussion by using extracts from the novel, the film, and the screenplay. I will also use quotes from theorists that are relevant to the topics that will be discussed. Ondaatje's novel is the original work of art, which has been transformed into screenplay and film; however, I will assign individual qualities to all of them, as they are separate works of art that can be fully understood on their own. I have found it necessary to discuss just a few sections from the novel and the film. I chose to analyse the same areas of space when discussing the novel and the film in order to maintain a certain order. This will also enable me to compare any findings in one chapter to that of the others. The three main areas I will focus on are the topographical space of the Villa San Girolamo, the desert, and the metaphorical space of the commonplace book. These are areas of significant relevance and function as key spaces in *The English Patient* and its adaptation.

Having introduced issues that provide a contextual frame for the understanding of *The English Patient*, I will now proceed to discuss the topographical space of the novel.

The following chapter will mainly examine the space of the Villa San Girolamo and the desert. I will draw parallels to issues I find relevant for these specific areas, such as the villa's architecture and the presence of trompe l'oeil. The space of these distinct areas also affects the characters' notion of identity. I will discuss how space and identity are interrelated and the consequences of this. Changes within the characters and their surroundings are also relevant when examining the villa. Another major part of the proceeding chapter is the desert and its characteristic landscape. Issues that will be examined are the nomadic aspect of this space and its lack of borders. I will also draw a parallel between the characteristics of this landscape and Almásy and Katharine. Extracts from the novel will be used in this and the following chapter in order to illustrate and support my discussion.

In the third chapter I will analyse the metaphorical space of the commonplace book. This chapter is concerned with how the book has undergone a process of deterritorialization and become an intertextual space. The metaphorical space of the commonplace book contains literary self-consciousness and narrative terms, such as prolepsis and ellipsis. These are relevant issues and will be discussed in the exploration of the book as a space.

The fourth chapter is a discussion of Minghella's adaptation of *The English Patient*. In analysing the same spaces as those of the preceding chapters, I will look more closely at film language. I will elaborate on the differences between the novel and its adaptation. Consequently, I will also examine cinematic techniques for the creation of space. The shifting of scenes and the use of sound are also relevant issues in the discussion of space within the film. I will provide illustrative quotations from Minghella's screenplay and extracts from the film in order to support my choice of relating these terms to my main topic: space.

Chapter 2. The typographical space

Introduction

Space in literature is created through the process of individual visualization. With as many visualizations of a space as there are readers of a text, on what basis does the author create space? Action has to be frozen or left out, and some kind of description of space has to take place. I find it very fascinating to think of what space does to the reader and the writer. This is why I have chosen to focus on how and why the narrator uses the concept of space. What are the dimensions of space as a literary phenomenon? Is it a tool to express something more, something beyond the limitations of words? What levels of meaning may be found in the construction of space as a dimension? In this chapter I will focus on two areas of space that stand out in *The English Patient*: the Villa San Girolamo and the desert. My aim in this examination is to try to clarify and identify any existing motifs the narrator may have when introducing us to these areas. They are areas where narrative events take place. Both sites constitute the place of action, and the characters involved. But these are the only features they have in common. They are two very different types of space.

The concept of space within the frame of the villa and the desert will be analysed. Firstly I will examine the villa San Girolamo, as this constitutes the main narrative frame of the plot. I find it inevitable not to touch upon the effect this space has on the characters. As a result, I will discuss identity, since this issue is highly relevant in the work of Michael Ondaatje. I will also look into the architecture of the villa and examine the influence it has on the characters. As the novel spans over some time the notion of change will also be discussed. When examining the desert, I will analyse the nomadic aspect of the landscape and of *The English Patient*. The issue of borders is also highly significant to this type of space as

it appears to be an endless landscape. Having introduced the main areas of examination in this chapter, I will move on to the villa in question.

The Villa San Girolamo

The Villa San Girolamo, built to protect inhabitants from the flesh of the devil, had the look of a besieged fortress, the limbs of most of the statues blown off during the first days of shelling. There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth. To Hana the wild gardens were like further rooms. She worked along the edges of them aware always of unexploded mines. (43)

This paragraph presents a number of elements that are of importance in this chapter. We are introduced to the villa, and at the same time we are informed of the blurred border of the inside and outside, which I believe is one of the most prominent characteristics of the novel. Before I go on I will like to dig deeper into the many descriptions of the villa in order to obtain a better understanding of the points that will be analysed in this chapter.

In the different sections of the novel, where the villa is described to the reader, almost no narration of action is communicated. We are mostly just presented a description of the space inside and outside the villa.

Behind the villa a rock wall rose higher than the house. To the west of the building was a long enclosed garden, and twenty miles away was the carpet of the city of Florence, which often disappeared under the mist of the valley. (42)

The location of the villa seems quite picturesque as we are informed of its surroundings. In these descriptive passages all action is taken out and the reader is left alone with just a space.

This makes it easier to visualize the appearance of what is being described.

There are two levels of long, narrow garden to the west of the house. A formal terrace and, higher up, the darker garden, where stone steps and concrete statues almost disappear under the green mildew of the rains. (124)

The focus is placed on the portrayal of the location. It is as if the author emphasizes every topographical detail by leaving out the action.

The villa is not just a common house. Homi Bhaba states that '[...] the problem of outside/inside [is a] process of hybridity, [...] generating other sites of meaning' (Bhaba 2002: 4). I believe this villa is hybrid in the way that it is neither a house nor a ruin. It works both ways, according to the position of the viewer.³ Ondaatje must have included this aspect for a reason, and I believe the reason is to generate a symbolic meaning. The villa's appearance is of great importance in the novel and I believe it has a highly symbolic side to it.

Between the kitchen and the destroyed chapel a door led into an oval-shaped library. The space inside seemed safe except for a large hole at portrait level in the far wall, caused by mortar-shell attack on the villa two months earlier. The rest of the room had adapted itself to this wound, accepting the habits of weather, evening stars, the sound of birds. [...]

At the far end were French doors that were boarded up. If they had been open she could have walked from the library to the loggia, then down thirty-six penitent steps past the chapel towards what had been an ancient meadow, scarred now by phosphorus bombs and explosions. (11)

It is a damaged building with war-wounds. The villa is symbolic because its condition and characteristics at once reflect and accentuate those of the characters. They are people with injured and fractured souls due to the war. They are all in need of care. Hence the villa, when visualized by the reader, plays an important role in symbolizing the condition of the characters in a way words cannot. Ondaatje is describing a space that reflects the different characters' state, both physically and psychologically.

Architecture

One's surroundings, or architecture in general, can be an important factor when analysing oneself. Bhaba refers to Renée Green's use of architecture when applying binary categories

³ If a house must have four walls and a roof in order to be a house, then the villa is not a house. But if a house is a place where one is able to sleep and eat, then the villa certainly is a house.

to the process of defining one's identity. Green uses different rooms to express binary divisions, such as higher and lower, which would lead to the associations, such as heaven and hell. She claims that 'the stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas ...' (Bhaba 2002: 3 –4). Homi Bhaba sees the stairwell as an in-between space, a liminal space that constructs a connection between the different areas inside the house. 'The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities' (Bhaba 2002: 4). The liminal space can be found in various ways in the Villa San Girolamo, as its ruined rooms function as stairwells, all leading either to a new room or to the outside. I agree with Bhaba's view, as this could be one reason why the different protagonists struggle so much in settling into polarized identities. The constant movements and passages, caused by the architecture, become a confusing factor in their daily struggle in locating their identity. I will come back to the important issue of identity within the book later in this chapter.

By using space to mirror the condition of the different characters, Ondaatje employs a method comparable to that which Minghella uses when adapting the book to screen. The only difference is that as Minghella visualises the space and the characters *for* the reader, Ondaatje lets *the reader* visualize the villa and links this picture to the protagonists' inner state. He has created a very complex world where characters and their surroundings are interrelated and dependent upon each other. They reflect each other and change together accordingly. The aspect of change will be discussed in the end of this chapter.

The villa does not have clear-cut boundaries. It does not have four walls and a roof. The space of the villa extends into the landscape; one can see the stars and feel the wind inside the villa. Some of its

rooms faced onto the valley with no walls at all. She would open a door and see just a sodden bed huddled against a corner, covered with leaves. Doors opened into landscape. Some rooms had become an open aviary. (13)

The shattered villa gives an impression of being an open and inclusive space since there are no clear-cut borders. It is an area without limits. One can be inside the villa and still see the sky. But the sense of the inside crossing over into the outside is not a new invention.

Architecture has been a field and a matter of major importance to human kind for thousands of years. And the mixing and mingling of outside versus inside has had, and still has, a certain position within the field of architecture. The division of nature and civilized housing has been an established concept many architects have been tempted to play with. This has resulted in the creation of housing with blurred borderlines between inner and outer space as an established concept within this field.

Geir Grung, a Norwegian master within the discipline of architecture, lets his love for nature shine through in his creations. The basis for his creations can be found in nature, such as forms, colours, and earthly inspiration. His architecture makes it possible to experience a shady-less space being filled with the light of the morning sun. Grung uses a concise and limited volume of glass to create a contrast to the open nature surrounding the building. Many of his works can be characterized by the glass walls, which make the surrounding nature penetrate into the more or less borderless space of the house. The glass walls also functions as sliding doors during summer and this creates rooms that are in huge contrast to the darker and windowless rooms in the basement (Askim et al. 2001: 102 – 103). The result of such architecture is the creation of a harmonic atmosphere. It unites nature and human life. It brings the residents closer to nature and nature closer to the residents. I believe it leads to a state of peace. But it is also important to remember that nature can be dangerous and powerful. Residents would probably feel more at risk in stormy weather, as such housing would lead to an illusion of nature penetrating the borders of the housing, hence braking through the ‘walls of safety’. Humans and animals always seem to seek shelter in bad and ruthless weather. A housing of Grung’s architecture will still function as a shelter, but its

transparency will also lead to an illusion of insecurity. In the villa San Girolamo however, nature's penetration is not an illusion.

There was a sofa, a piano covered in a grey sheet, the head of a stuffed bear and high walls of books. The shelves nearest the torn wall bowed with the rain, which had doubled the weight of the books. Lightening came into the room too, again and again, falling across the covered piano and carpet. (11)

The villa does not have 'walls of safety'. Nature can cross the borders of inside and outside; hence the character's sense of insecurity is not ungrounded. Still; Geir Grung's architecture resembles the Villa San Girolamo, where walls are blown away; hence shadowless places within the house are created. One obvious difference is the fact that Grung's buildings were intentionally created with a borderless space, while the villa in *The English Patient* is ruined due to the war. But they both have blurred borders, intentionally or non-intentionally, where the inside and outside float together.

One of Grung's intentions of letting nature penetrate what is usually a fixed border dividing the outside from the inside is to create a more free state of being. One can easily think such a villa as San Girolamo, with rooms that enter the garden and vice versa, will create a sense of freedom, freedom to roam around in a landscape of wild vegetation and sophisticated, yet ruined, housing. But the protagonists living in the villa are restricted from such activity because the place is mined. Hana is either stricken by naivety, stupidity, or stubbornness as she exploits the garden and the house uninhibited. Apparently, the thought of war does not make her take precautions.

She was twenty years old and mad and unconcerned with safety during this time, having no qualms about the dangers of the possibly mined library or the thunder that startled her in the night. She was restless after the cold months, when she had been limited to dark, protected spaces. She entered rooms that had been soiled by soldiers, rooms whose furniture had been burned within them. She cleared out leaves and shit and urine and charred tables. She was living like a vagrant, while elsewhere the English patient reposed in his bed like a king. (13 – 14)

Hana does not let the condition of the house restrain her.

Trompe l'oeil

Another element I find very interesting, and which is often mentioned in the novel, is the presence of trompe l'oeil. This is a painting technique that through its strongly two-dimensional effect creates an illusion of a virtual space. The English patient resides in a room with such wall painting. 'He wakes in the painted arbour that surrounds him with its spilling flowers, arms of great trees' (4). Hana usually 'sat in the window alcove in the English patient's room, the painted walls on one side of her, the valley on the other' (12).

Some rooms are painted, each room has a different season. (29) Moonlight across the foliage on the walls. This was the only light that made the trompe l'oeil seem convincing. She could pluck that flower and pin it onto her dress. (31)

When viewed in the right light, or from the right angle, this painting deludes the viewer into thinking it represents reality. This makes the borders between the outside and inside of the villa even more blurred as the trompe l'oeil illustrates a garden. It emphasises the fact that the garden penetrates the villa. The garden does not just show through the walls and windows that are no longer there; it is also permanently painted on the walls inside the villa. I believe the permanence of a painting is something that appealed to Almásy, as he seems to have a strong belief in predictability.

I have lived in the desert for years and have come to believe in such things. It is the place of pockets. The trompe l'oeil of time and water. The jackal with one eye that looks back and one that regards the path you consider taking. (259)

According to Almásy, everything in one way or the other is controlled by destiny. 'When all of that time is fully discovered it will prove to have been already known' (259). The trompe l'oeil is a picture from the past that will remain for centuries. It has a story and has seen many scenarios that will remain a secret. One can only guess at its rich knowledge, which will always be there under the surface. Another feature significant for *The English Patient* is

identity. Along with the trompe l'oeil in the villa, the essence of the protagonists' identity seem to be somewhat blurred.

Identity

The villa is a space inhabited by multiple worlds, by people of different nationalities and backgrounds, at a time when belonging and nationality was of great importance. I believe the villa represents a space where the question of identity and nationality becomes inevitable. The problem of identity is explored in many ways in *The English Patient*. According to Gaston Bachelard, the 'house is our corner of the world [...] it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word' (Bachelard 1994: 4). He finds the notion of identity to be a very important aspect of space. It is in the house we first start to create our perception of identity. We build upon reflections and thoughts that take place in our first universe, namely the house. I agree with him. But the villa is not the protagonist's first cosmos; they are all adults and carry with them a fragmented yet fully developed 'identity package'. I will start this chapter by further examining the term 'identity'.

Identity is a problematic term in the sense that one cannot claim to have just one identity. A person's characteristics and identity change according to what environment he/she is in. Most of us have multiple identities depending on the situation and circumstances we find ourselves in. These circumstances can be competing and even conflicting. H. L. Gates points out that our cultural identities are formed through interaction and are 'always in dialogue, [...] they [...] exist only in relation to one another, and [...] are, like everything else, sites for contest and negotiation, self-fashioning and refashioning' (Rønning 2001: 110-111). Hence identity is dynamic; it changes and varies according to where one is placed both in time and space.

Our very mode of understanding is implicated in our mode of partisanship, and our mode of partisanship is an expression or function of our location – what that location includes and excludes. Inside / outside perceptions are indeed very much alive, and there is no transideological free space of arbitration to adjudicate among multiple nonsynchronous boundaries. (Castle 2001: 196)

In other words, one perceives belonging and identify differently according to where one is placed in any given society. '[...] there is hardly a world around them and they are forced back on themselves' (40). Life at the villa makes identity become crucially important. It is an inevitable topic. The protagonists have to deal with their traumatic experiences and place themselves onto the 'map of identity'. They have to find out who they are, label themselves, and figure out how to obtain that label.

The protagonists can relate to each other in the way they have all been struck by the cruelties of war and yet survived. This creates a certain type of bonding between them. The protagonists also have the same cultural background, coming or having spent some time in western countries, and thereby belong to the same cultural tradition. This is both true and wrong. Whether Almásy is incapable of remembering his place of birth or deliberately neglects to mention it, is unknown. But he *does* come from a western country. Hana and Caravaggio are both from Canada, but war has led them to Italy. Even Kip, who is born in India, has a western background. This makes it easier for them to relate to and partly identify with each other.

It is important to keep in mind that the protagonists are placed in a temporary and unnatural space. They are situated at the villa due to the war, they are staying there temporarily, and no one has a sense of belonging to the area. But since this is the only environment the characters are given in the novel, it is impossible for us as readers to analyse the characters from a different perspective than the space they are placed within. Such displacement strongly affects our perception of the different character's identity, as it is more difficult to analyse a person when he/she is taken out of his/her usual context. How do we

analyse a person outside his/her usual space? This problem is often experienced by travellers when interacting with people they encounter. The first mental process when meeting others, intentionally or unconsciously, is to label the other. We automatically try to categorize them into stereotypes. This is much easier if we are aware of the other person's origin and background. If we do not have this knowledge we use our first impression, which most of us know is a quite risky approach. But this is the problem of the external person, the one who wants to analyse *you*, or your problem if you are to categorize the other. But how is one to 'find' and 'label' *oneself* in such an alien environment? How is one to approach the problem if *you* are taken out of your usual context and *you* want to seek belonging? Hana is a character who seeks to avoid the need for reconstructing a sense of belonging. Is her approach successful? She more or less succeeds in this matter, but only temporarily. She cannot continue to neglect herself in the long run.

Hana seems to be indifferent towards life and death, until the day she realizes she has fallen in love with Kip. But at the same time she has searched and created a space where she is needed. The house will probably become uninhabitable without her.

The staircase had lost its lower steps during the fire that was set before the soldiers left. She had gone into the library, removed twenty books and nailed them to the floor and then onto each other, in this way rebuilding the two lowest steps. (13)

She seems to be practical when the situation demands it. She is a hard-working woman who clears out the garden, grows different herbs, and cooks and cleans for the other protagonists. The one that is mostly dependant upon her is the English patient. He is helpless without her and will die without her care.

He glares out, each eye a path, down the long bed at the end of which is Hana. After she has bathed him she breaks the tip off an ampoule and turns to him with the morphine. An effigy. A bed. He rides the boat of morphine. It races in him, imploding time and geography the way maps compress the world onto a two-dimensional sheet of paper. (161)

He needs her caring and her knowledge as a nurse. She has placed herself within a situation where she plays a crucial role for his well-being and survival. Caravaggio is dependent on her storage of morphine as he uses the drug to get through the day. He is in enormous pain due to his amputated thumbs and in a very fragile psychological state.

During the last stages of the war Caravaggio had become one of the numerous morphia thieves. He had sniffed out her medical supplies within hours of his arrival. [...] Caravaggio carried two or three in his pocket all day long, slipping the fluid into his flesh. She had stumbled on him once vomiting from its excess, crouched and shaking in one of the corners of the villa, looking up and hardly recognizing her. (166)

And Kip would not be alive was it not for her courage. One time Kip tries to defuse a bomb near the villa. Hanna comes to his aid, although Kip does not seem too grateful.

“You better go.”

“You need another hand to cut it, don’t you?”

“I can attach it to the tree.”

“I’ll hold it.”

He picked the wire like a thin adder from her left hand. Then the other. She didn’t move away. He said nothing more, he now had to think as clearly as he could, as if he were alone. (102)

[...]

He was still annoyed the girl had stayed with him when he defused the bomb, as if by that she had made him owe her something. Making him feel in retrospect responsible for her [...]. (104)

By insisting on helping him, she creates a bond between them, something he finds restraining.

There has become an element of dependence between them. Hana ‘wanted Kip to know her only in the present, a person perhaps more flawed or more compassionate or harder or more obsessed than the girl or young woman she had been then’ (268). Hana seems to be desperately groping for a place in this world where she can be fulfilled. That is why she has chosen to live in the villa, where her patient needs her. Yet, at times it seems as if she does not find a fulfilling space at the villa. She is lost within the deep and dark wells of her mind, as she keeps a lot to herself and drowns herself in whatever literature she comes across. ‘This was the time in her life that she fell upon books as the only door out of her cell. They became half her world’ (7). Even the English patient realizes that she is a wounded person. He

‘noticed the young nurse, separate from the others. He was familiar with such dead glances, knew she was more patient than nurse’ (97 – 98). When she does enter the real world, she allows herself to become attached to Kip, a relationship that is doomed from the start, due to their differing positions. I do believe Hana knows it is a relationship that can only be in the present, within the frame of their time at the villa. Neither will let the other enter their past or future. They are from too different worlds for their relationship to last. Compassion and sexual desire are not strong enough feelings to create a bridge between them.

Hana is the protagonist who in my view has succeeded the most in creating a world the others cannot do without. This is her way of surviving. She is making herself busy with saving and helping others. That ‘she was in rough shape herself’ (28-29) is highlighted by the fact that it is repeated twice and also written in italics. I find it interesting to see how Caravaggio reflects upon her strategy of survival.

A lean face with hair cut short, without mask and mystery of her long hair. If anything, she seems calm in this universe of hers. The fountain gurgling in the background, the hawks, the ruined garden of the villa. Maybe this is the way to come out of a war, he thinks. A burned man to care for, some sheets to wash in a fountain, a room painted like a garden. As if all that remains is a capsule from the past [...]. (33)

She seems to be a fragile yet strong person. She is definitely hurt by the war, yet she has managed to find a way to survive.

Moments before sleep are when she feels most alive, leaping across fragments of the day, bringing each moment into the bed with her like a child with schoolbooks and pencils. The day seems to have no order until these times, which are like a ledger for her, her body full of stories and situations. (35 – 36)

Hana has become a fragment that longs for a whole. She can either obtain this by using her imagination or letting time repair her wounds. I believe she retreats into herself as she prolongs the process of healing by sinking into everyone else’s story. ‘She was secure in the miniature world she had built; the two other men seemed distant planets, each in his own sphere of memory and solitude’ (47). Perhaps distance and neglect towards her own grief and

pain prove a fruitful approach to sanity. She also seems to take advantage of time as it will eventually heal and soothe her pain.

Hana and the villa are alike in the sense that they are both wounded by the war, Hana psychologically and the villa physically. The villa represents her wounded soul, her loss in war. The villa is partly ruined due to the loss of windows, roofs, and walls. Hana, on the other hand, has lost her father, her lover, and she has had an abortion. The difference is that Hana carries her loss and grief inside, while the villa lets everyone see it in its rather bad condition.

Hana desperately tries to seek a truth and value in life by staying at the villa. It seems she finds it difficult to create a border between her surroundings and her imagination. This character feature of hers can also be compared to the villa as it does not have clear-cut boundaries between inside and outside. Hana

felt like Robinson Crusoe finding a drowned book that had washed up and dried itself on the shore [...] She entered the story knowing she would emerge from it feeling she had been immersed in the lives of others, in plots that stretched back twenty years, her body full of sentences and moments, as if awaking from sleep with a heaviness caused by unremembered dreams. (12)

Hana's consciousness is blurred. She has been through highly traumatic events and her way of dealing with her situation is by combining the real world and her imaginary world.

Nurses too became shell-shocked from the dying around them. Or from something as small as a letter. They would carry a severed arm down a hall, or swab at blood that never stopped, as if the wound were a well, and they began to believe in nothing, trusted nothing. They broke the way a man dismantling a mine broke the second his geography exploded. The way Hana broke in Santa Chiara Hospital when an official walked down the space between a hundred beds and gave her a letter that told her of the death of her father. [...] It was some time after this that she had come across the English patient - someone who looked like a burned animal, taut and dark, a pool for her. (41)

Hana reached the top of what a human can bear and sees a solution in the English Patient. He is a pool for her to sink into, a pool where she can drown her own worries and concentrate on someone else's. 'There was something about him she wanted to learn, grow into, and hide in,

where she could turn away from being an adult' (52). She keeps switching between being half adult and half child. She is young, yet she has made many mature decisions due to the stressful and tragic events she has been through. But at the same time it seems as if she wants to close her eyes from the real world, the way a child does, in order not to be seen when playing hide and seek. The cruelties of war is making her retrieve back into her 'childhood-shell' in order to survive from day to day.

All the characters placed in the villa want to create a space for themselves, a space where they can work out ways of surviving and digest their traumatic experiences. This has to be done both physically and psychologically, a difficult task represented by the blurred division of the villa and its surroundings. The ruined villa symbolizes the different characters' struggle to mend their fragile lives and mind. People's minds are made up of open doors that lead to cheerful or sad rooms, sealed doors that are the last remnants of rooms that are no longer there, and doors that are locked and will not open. To wander inside the minds of the characters is just as dangerous as walking around in the villa, as both the villa and the characters have mined rooms that have to be cleared. Beliefs and hopes are just as broken and damaged as the 'outdoor staircase [which] disappeared in midair, its railing hanging off' (14). Yet the fact that there are still signs of stairs suggests an element of hope. It creates a sense that not everything is ruined, and that what is there can be rebuilt.

Almásy, Caravaggio, and Kip also seem to lack crucial aspects that by definition make or create an individual. They are all torn and fragmented; they are hurt to such an extent that it affects their wholeness. I will provide examples for each of the male characters, in relation to their lives at the villa.

A significant paradox in *The English Patient* is the fact that the patient is not really English. He speaks English fluently and can easily be regarded as an Englishman. His nationality is unknown to the other protagonists. 'Who knew what country the war had made

him live in' (49). He was 'a man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire' (48).

He [...] rambled on, driving them mad, traitor or ally, leaving them never quite sure who he was. [...] He speaks in fragments about oasis towns, the later Medicis, the prose of Kipling, the woman who bit into his flesh. And in his commonplace book, his 1890 edition of Herodotus' *Histories*, are other fragments – maps, diary, entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books. All that is missing is his own name. There is still no clue to who he actually is, nameless, without rank or battalion or squadron. The references in his book are all pre-war, the deserts of Egypt and Libya in the 1930s, interspersed with references to cave art or gallery art or journal notes in his own small handwriting. (96)

During the course of the novel they find out his name and that he was born in Hungary. He worked with an international team mapping the desert, but due to tragic events he had to choose sides and gave crucial information to the Germans. Before they are told of this event the other protagonists (except Caravaggio) consider him to be an English citizen.

Almásy's sanity is uncertain.

The Englishman left months ago, Hana, he's with the Bedouin or in some English garden with phlox and shit. He probably can't even remember the woman he's circling around, trying to talk about. He doesn't know where the fuck he is'. (122)

Almásy is not too concerned about finding his own identity. The theme even scares him. Paradoxically, although Almásy is a mapmaker, his highest wish is to 'walk upon [...] an earth that had no maps' (261). The patient despises ownership and does not want to belong to any person or nation. Despite this fact he is the character that develops the strongest feeling of ownership and belonging. His lover is to become his saviour and at the same time his ruin. Katharine shows him passionate love and he becomes addicted to it. She gives him a gaping wound, which makes him crave for her love, he wants her to be entirely his, and for the first time in his life he loses control.

I believe it is appropriate to use the word 'loath' when it comes to Almásy and the theme of nationality. He sees it as a fixed and unnatural concept created by the human race to implement order, but in many cases leading to chaos and tragedy such as the death of his

beloved. The concept of nationality is a factor that throughout history has led to both war and peace. In the case of *The English Patient*, nationality is the factor that prevents Almásy from rescuing his lover. In desperation he claims belonging to the German nation and this makes it possible for him to retrieve Katharine's remains.

Caravaggio 'can return to no other world as he is ... he is a man in middle age who has never been accustomed to families. All his life he has avoided permanent intimacy' (116). This dread of commitment underlines Caravaggio's rootless personality. He does not seem capable or in want of being tied to anyone. This is not just a result of the war. It rather seems as if the war has underlined this aspect of him, made it more visible.

War has unbalanced him and he can return to no other world as he is, wearing these false limbs that morphine promises. He is a man in middle age who has never become accustomed to families. All his life he has avoided permanent intimacy. [...] He has been a man who slips away, in the way lovers leave chaos, the way thieves leave reduced houses. (116)

He does not seem to have a basis in his life to which he can retreat, a place where he belongs. But at the same time, he does not seem too concerned about creating a space where he can lick his wounded self, for he is obsessed by the idea of finding out what role Almásy has played during the war. However, life at the villa *does* frustrate him.

The trouble with all of us is we are where we shouldn't be. What are we doing in Africa, in Italy? What is Kip doing dismantling bombs in orchards, for God's sake? What is he doing fighting English wars? A farmer on the western front cannot prune a tree without ruining his saw. Why? (122)

Caravaggio is overwhelmed by the lack of sanity and logic of their situation. He seems to be seeking an explanation of why they (involuntarily and unaware) have been reduced to just some pawns in the game of those in power.

Kip, on the other hand, wonders what he was 'doing in *this* role' (268). He clearly sees his life at the villa as a role he has to play while he is there. Such a view can be his method of surviving. He perceives life at the villa as a role-play in which he has to participate

for as long as they live there. It is important not to forget that his role as a sapper eliminates some of the hopelessness of their situation. It is a meaningful and important role that makes him needed.

The sappers kept to themselves for the most part. They were an odd group as far as character went, somewhat like people who worked with jewels or stone, they had a hardness and clarity within them, their decisions frightening even to others in the same trade. [...] The sappers never became familiar with each other. When they talked they passed only information along, new devices, habits of the enemy. [...] He found out he had the skill of the three-dimensional gaze, the rogue gaze that could look at an object or page of information and realign it, see all the false descants. [...] The rogue gaze could see the buried line under the surface, how a knot might weave when out of sight. (110 – 111)

Life in Italy is a game he has to play right in order to survive. He seems highly aware of the fact that their life at the villa is not one that is to last. It is only a game, a role, for the time being.

Kip forms a relationship with Hana, but they seem very different. One example of their difference is the following:

Most of all she wished for a river they could swim in. There was a formality in swimming which she assumed was like being in a ballroom. But he had a different sense of rivers, had entered the Moro in silence and pulled the harness of cables attached to the folding Bailey bridge, the bolted steel panels of it slipping into the water behind him like a creature, and the sky then had lit up with shell fire and someone was sinking beside him in mid-river. (129)

It seems as if they are talking *to* each other, but not *with* each other. Their words do not obtain the intended effect on the other. The words are left in the air, and time does not give Hana and Kip an opportunity to solve their communicative problems. Another aspect that underlines the difference between them is observable in the following passage:

He knows the depth of darkness in her, her lack of child and of faith. He is always coaxing her from the edge of her fields of sadness. A child lost. A father lost. "I have lost someone like a father as well," he has said. But she knows this man beside her is one of the charmed, who has grown up an outsider and so can switch allegiances, can replace loss. There are those destroyed by unfairness and those who are not. If she asks him he will say he has had a good life – his brother in jail, his comrades blown up, and he risking himself daily in this war. (271 – 272)

Hana believes this 'is his world. [...] She lies there irritated at his self-sufficiency, his ability to turn so easily away from the world' (128). Perhaps this ability makes him the character who is most likely to get through the war safe and sound. He 'moved at a speed that allowed him to replace loss. That was his nature' (272). He does not seem to allow anyone to get inside the shell of his inner self, as he does not let anyone become irreplaceable. He seems to be a wanderer who accepts his own destiny. He goes wherever the path takes him. He may be afraid and in despair at times, but he is always capable of moving on.

The landscape around him is just a temporary thing, there is no permanence to it. He simply acknowledges the possibility of rain, a certain odour from a shrub. As if his mind, even when unused, is radar, his eyes locating the choreography of inanimate objects [...]. (86 – 87)

Nothing stops his hunger for life. Perhaps this is caused by his many 'near-death' experiences he has had as a sapper. Maybe 'The English – man [was right in calling] him *fato profuges* – fate's fugitive' (273). He seems to be an individual capable of escaping the most horrifying experiences by always being on the move, like a fugitive, avoiding to fall into fate's clutches. 'He is a survivor of his fears, [he] will step around anything suspicious [...] as if claiming he can deal with it all' (73).

Kip plays a very interesting part in Ondaatje's novel. He enriches the text with his postcolonial aspect. His Indian childhood and western education makes his position differ to that of the other characters. He represents a different point of view. His postcolonial view is highlighted as we read of his reaction to the Hiroshima bomb. It becomes evident that he is able to view this incident from two angles. His postcolonial heritage shows through, as he is unable to deal with the news at the villa. He becomes shocked when hearing on the radio about the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He blames the western ideology and he finds an outlet for this by threatening the patient with a rifle before leaving on

his motorbike.⁴ Almásy represents all that is English for Kip, and he feels deeply betrayed by a nation he has admired so much. On the basis of nationality, Kip threatens someone who despises nationality, someone who has lost everything he had (even his face) due to nationality, and someone who is not even English. The bomb disposal expert, born in Lahore and trained in England, understands that the allies would never have dropped such a horrifying bomb on a city of white people. He 'is disgusted by the legacy of colonialism in the war' (Schimanski 2001, 128). The news of this tragedy makes him move away from his former assimilated life to that of rebellion. He distances himself from those who support such an incomprehensible and gruesome act. This aspect of Kip is partly lost in the novel's adaptation. The atomic bomb is not included in the film at all. The result of such omission is a loss of a postcolonial feature, which is a highly prominent element of the novel.⁵

The notion of change

The tone changes during the course of the novel. There is a change within the characters, and their view of the villa. This change is noticeable in the novel as well as in the film. In the first part of the book there are many references to Almásy being a well. Hana seems to be very attracted to this well, which is a pool for her she can use in order to distract and avoid her own traumas. Towards the end of the novel they both 'came out of the well' (222). Hana's habit of drowning herself in other's problems (in order to neglect her own) ceases. 'What she was now was what she herself had decided to become' (222). She seems to have gained control of her life again. She plays an active part in deciding who and what she wants to be. The villa too seems to have awoken from the hibernation of war as 'the room has now finally emerged from the war, is no longer a zone or territory' (224). The characters and the villa are

⁴ It is quite ironic that Kip, in his anger, threatens the patient and blames him for the misdeed of the English nation. Almásy, as it turns out, was a desert explorer who turned spy-helper for the Germans.

⁵ This is discussed further in chapter 4.

no longer defined by war. The tone has changed. The atmosphere seems to be more positive. It is as if spring has come to replace a far too long winter.

The same notion of change can be found in Minghella's adaptation. In the beginning of the film, the villa was shown in all its humiliation. Hana wanted to be left alone with her patient, and welcomed neither Caravaggio nor Kip. None of them wanted the company of the others (except for Hana and her patient), as they were sceptic, suspicious, shocked, and hurt. But towards the end of the film, Minghella's shot signals a more optimistic atmosphere. The characters seem less burdened. They have dinners together, they play old records, they dance, and so forth. They have created a small society between themselves at the villa. They all seem to enjoy each other's company. The war is coming to an end, and they have survived.

I will now move on to an area which, in my opinion, is even more complex in its spatial construction, as it has no visible ends or markers of beginnings, namely the desert.

The desert

There is, after Herodotus, little interest by the Western world towards the desert for hundreds of years. From 425 B.C. to the beginning of the twentieth century there is an averting of eyes. Silence. The nineteenth century was an age of river seekers. And then in the 1920s there is a sweet postscript history on this pocket of earth, made mostly by private funded expeditions and followed by modest lectures given at the Geographical Society in London at Kensington Gore. These lectures are given by sunburned, exhausted men who, like Conrad's sailors, are not too comfortable with the etiquette of taxis, the quick, flat wit of bus conductors (133). [...] By the mid-1930s the lost oasis of Zerzura was found by Ladislaus de Almásy and his companions. In 1936 the great decade of Libyan Desert expeditions came to an end, and this vast and silent pocket of the earth became one of the theatres of war. (134)

This is how the narrator introduces chapter IV 'South Cairo 1930 – 1938'. The paragraph is full of fact-like information, which leads to the questioning of the novel's trustworthiness.

The notion of the novel's credibility is strengthened by the inclusion of a lecture given at the Geographical Society in the 1940s on one of the first pages of the book. Such inclusion of events that have actually occurred strengthens the reader's belief in the credibility in what is

being said. Paul Lejeune has introduced the term ‘the autobiographical pact’, which is constituted by the fact that the reader expects a close relationship between the author, the writer, and the narrator. Such a relationship makes the text believable. If this faith or pact is broken the text will fall into the genre of fiction (Lejeune 1989: 5). *The English Patient* is no doubt a work of fiction, having multiple narrators and giving no expectations of a relationship between the author, the writer, or the narrator. But it contains many samples of events and descriptions that a general reader is led to believe are historically true. Count Laszlo De Almásy is a person who has existed and who worked in the desert before and during the war. It is true that explorers found many archaeological sites in the Saharan desert. The Rebecca spy is credible. Kip’s descriptions of bomb disposal are reliable. These fact-like descriptions are supported by the frequent referencing to other texts within the book, which inevitably leads to a belief in what is being communicated. As readers we are aware that what is written is fiction, but at the same time it *could* be true.⁶

The notion of truth also prompts the question of Almásy’s identity. Along with Caravaggio we wonder who he really is. His account of the desert reveals a lot about him. Why did he have this passionate relationship towards the desert? What sort of a space is it?

The *harmattan* blows across the Sahara filled with red dust, dust as fire, as flour, entering and coagulating in the locks of rifles [...] producing showers of mud so great this was also mistaken for blood. (17)

This paragraph explains the complex feelings Almásy has towards the desert. For many years this used to be his home and his working place. Yet this is the space in which his life would change forever. The elements of ‘fire’ and ‘water’ are mentioned along with ‘red’ and ‘blood’, thus creating a very dramatic picture of the desert. The foreign word ‘harmattan’, the detailed description of dust entering rifles, and the metaphoric way of describing blowing sand as ‘showers of mud’ are clear indications that Almásy knew the desert well. What

⁶ After the film’s ending, Minghella has included a part where the spectators are told that although some elements of the film are true (like the Cave of Swimmers) and some of the characters have existed (Count Laszlo De Almásy) the story is basically fiction. This is, of course, also applicable for Ondaatje’s novel.

caused this very intimate relationship between him and the desert, and why he had these passionate feelings, both negatively and positively, are questions we can only guess at.

The desert is a landscape containing both beauty and danger. It can be explained and described with highly opposing adjectives, such as calm – chaotic, peaceful –dramatic and so forth. Here is an event told by Almásy:

[...] the sandstorm [...] hit us out of clear morning, coming from nowhere. The breeze that had been refreshing had gradually strengthened. Eventually we looked down, and the surface of the desert was changed. Pass me the book ... here. This is Hassanein Bey's wonderful account of such storms – *"It is as though the surface were underlaid with steam-pipes, with thousands of orifices through which tiny jets of steam are puffing out. The sand leaps in little spurts and whirls. [...] It seems as though the whole surface of the desert were rising in obedience to some upthrusting force beneath. [...] The sand-grains climb the body till it strikes the face and goes over the head. The sky is shut out, all but the nearest objects fade from view, the universe is filled."*

We had to keep moving. If you pause and sand builds up as it would around anything stationary, and locks you in. You are lost forever. [...] Three a.m. The gale swept the tents from their moorings and we rolled with them, taking in sand like a sinking boat takes in water, weighed down, suffocating, till we were cut free by a camel driver. (137, original emphases)

The desert seems to be an extremely moody environment that shifts rapidly. Almásy seems to have very passionate feelings towards it. It is a wild landscape that he is never able to control. In this respect, the desert can very well be seen as a reflection of Katharine's personality. She also seems to possess an endless beauty along with a dangerousness caused by Almásy's desire to own and control her.⁷ Words that are representative of Almásy's feelings towards the desert and Katharine are warmth, beauty, danger, and boundless passion. The similarity between Katharine and the desert is even more striking in the film. I will come back to this resemblance in chapter 4.

The desert is a landscape possessed of many contradictory features. It is one of the warmest areas and has a vibrating reddish colour during the day, yet at night the sky turns

⁷ It is important to keep in mind that we only get to know Katharine through Almásy's accounts. She is not included in the story's presence, nor is she given an equal role as that of the protagonists. Her thoughts and behaviour is communicated to the reader through Almásy's interpretations. She plays a more visible role in the film, as will be touched upon in chapter 4.

almost black and it becomes fatally cold. It can turn from being calm and beautiful to suddenly drown the horizon with whirling desert sand as fine-grained as dust that will penetrate and drown anything. More strikingly, this is a landscape almost impossible to cross as it goes on as far as the eye can see even when travelling for days. There is nothing like it in Europe and it must seem very exotic for someone foreign to this environment, such as Almásy used to be. Another factor that I believe is the cause of his yearning and excitement towards the desert is that he saw the landscape as a space free of limitations and borders. He perceived it as a boundless area. The desert gives an impression of being part of an endless landscape of sand, rocks and sand dunes. I am tempted to suggest that the desert (along with other endless landscapes, such as the sea and the sky) has no room for time. The space of the desert excludes time since it gives the impression of being a geographical area that goes on forever.

Eternity and time are two abstract concepts that are difficult to unite. The human mind struggles with the perception of terms like ‘forever’ and ‘endless’. This results in time having no foundation to exist in the desert, as the surroundings are everlasting. The absence of time could be an appealing factor for Almásy. Time is a human invention. It helps civilization to keep order and control. Almásy is running away from anything civilized. He escapes into the desert where western civilization has not yet taken control. But this again leads to a great paradox within Almásy. He comes from the west, and one of his greatest passions is to map the desert, a passion that can be linked to the practice and desire of imperialists. Map-making is closely linked to the claiming of ownership. One must not forget the time of the setting, as this was the beginning of the Second World War. Map-making was crucial for both sides when it came to mobility, communication and the claiming of land, and ironically this is exactly the information Almásy gave to the Germans. This conquering aspect of Almásy can also be linked to his feelings towards Katharine. In many

ways he can be seen as an imperialist, who longs for the claiming of ownership. Yet paradoxically he seems to loath ownership and belonging.⁸

It is also important to remember that the desert is full of mystique as it is ‘a world that [has] been civilized for centuries, [containing] thousand paths and roads’ (140), yet at the same time, for the foreign eye, it probably seems desolate and barbaric. Almásy is an archaeologist and explorer, and this can partly explain his passionate relationship towards the geographical area. It is full of undiscovered ancient sites (even today) and contains an archaeological richness scientists can only dream of.

A nomadic aspect

The desert is a harsh and dangerous place, yet at the same time harmonic and beautiful. These are the factors that appeal to Almásy; they make his life meaningful and liveable, but they also lead to his destruction. He is able to control the desert and wander across it like no other foreign person could. He knows how to ‘read’ its nature.⁹ Almásy has obtained his knowledge from the natives of the desert. In this respect, it is possible to see the desert as a nomadic space. By this I mean a space inhabited by a dynamic people always on the move. Nomads are a people that due to their way of living are scattered and have a high degree of mobility (Eriksen 1998: 254). They are often thought of as wanderers of the desert.

Most readers of *The English Patient* will find the desert an unfamiliar space. Exotic is a characterizing adjective for the foreign eye. I believe Ondaatje has transferred this general comprehension elegantly in his book as he describes the desert as through a mysterious filter.

⁸ This can also be linked to his use or abuse of Herodotus’ book as he competes with the space of the original text. It is as if he places his own writing above that of Herodotus’. He conquers the original text. I will discuss this issue further in chapter 3.

⁹ Such control and possession was what he wanted over Katharine as well. But he failed. This partly caused his destruction. The desert also betrays him when he most depended upon it. He has to leave Katharine in a cave since it would be suicide to cross the desert with her, in her physical state.

The Bedouin knew about fire. They knew about planes that since 1939 had been falling out of the sky. [...] It was the time of the war in heaven. They could recognize the drone of a wounded plane, they knew how to pick their way through such shipwrecks. A small bolt from a cockpit became jewellery. I was perhaps the first one to stand up alive out of a burning machine. A man whose head was on fire. They didn't know my name. I didn't know their tribe. (5)

Almásy is saved from a quick death by a nomadic tribe. It makes sense to compare Almásy and the nomads' way of living. He lives a wandering life as a mapmaker in the desert. As a result of his accident, he has been reduced to a nursing case, constantly drifting in and out of consciousness. We follow him as he switches between present observations and actions, and memories and dreams of his previous life. He represents a wandering narrative, a rolling stone character, which again symbolizes a nomad's way of life.

Almásy is not the only nomadic character in the book. Hana also leads a nomadic way of life in the villa, as she

[...] would bang spikes into whatever walls she desired, whichever room she wanted to wake in, floating above all the filth and cordite and water on the floors [...] (47). She herself preferred to be nomadic in the house with her pallet of hammock, sleeping sometimes in the English patient's room, sometimes in the hall, depending on temperature or wind or light. (13)

The above extract proves her bruised soul and the unrest it is giving her. The tragedies of war make her behave like a hurt animal as she keeps a lot to herself and does not seem to appreciate the company of others (in the beginning of the novel). She is seeking to find herself and a space in which to place herself.

Nomadic is not only a term that can be applied to a certain type of space. It can also indicate a certain mode of travelling. Almásy is a traveller. He is far away from where he was born, he does not have a basis in life as he 'had erased the path he had emerged from' (170), and he seems to have undertaken many journeys in his past. I believe it is fruitful to analyse Almásy in the light of Islams's division of travel literature. As mentioned in chapter 1, nomadic travel is a part of life; it becomes a way of living. Almásy can easily be placed

under the label of nomadic traveller. He seems to treat the desert with great respect; he has studied its history and old legends. It is important to see his behaviour and appearance in light of the period the plot takes place, which is before the Second World War. The fact that he can speak the locals' language and that he interacts with the indigenous people of the area qualifies him as a nomadic traveller. He seems to be very adaptable. Yet at the same time he is a watcher, not a participant. He has placed himself in this landscape. No matter how much he tries he will always be distanced from the people of the desert. He will be a western person to them even if he had spent his whole life there. His background and looks will always create a division between him and the locals. There will always be an invisible border between them, which he cannot cross.

Borders

... the turbulent river of space between them. (301)

The concept of borders is a topic that permeates the novel. The protagonists get to feel the limiting effect of borders on their bodies all the time. They are restricted by the aftermath of war; they cannot leave the villa due to the situation surrounding them. They are living in a period characterised by war; they are under constant threat of mines, they lack food and sleep, they have bruised souls, and torn selves. Despite this, images of boundary-braking elements flow into almost every part of the story. One such element is water (or fluid in general). Images of water create a sense of a space without boundaries. Being a space only inhabited by nomads, borders are of less or of no importance in the desert. Countries and nations melt together and become one. Almásy's passionate relationship towards the desert is caused by its lack of borders. He perceives and compares the desert to the sea. This is done through describing the desert with synonyms that resemble images of water. The frequent use of water-like descriptive words is evocative and thematically productive.

In Tassili I have seen rock engravings from a time when the Sahara people hunted water horses from reed boats. In Wadi Sura I saw caves whose walls were covered with paintings of swimmers. Here there had been a lake. [...] I could lead them to its edge, six thousand years ago. (18)

Water is an alien element within this geographical space; hence it becomes a cherished and holy resource. Being a more or less non-existent element might contribute to water becoming a central issue within the nomads' lives. Interestingly, the desert used to be the sea floor once. One can find fossilized shells from Morocco to Egypt even to this day.¹⁰ Not only is water an element that used to exist in the desert, it also has the same appearance as the landscape of the desert. Wind shapes the sand and a wave-like surface (just like the surface of the sea) can be seen as far as the eye can reach. There are even areas of quicksand that will drown any by-passers as easily as rough waters. When sand tips over the ridge of a sand dune, it will roll like running water down the slope.

Here in the desert, which had been an old sea where nothing was strapped down of permanent, everything drifted – like the shift of linen across the boy as if he were embracing of freeing himself from an ocean of his own blue afterbirth (22). [...] In the desert you celebrate nothing but water. (23)

When one finds oneself in lack of something, it suddenly becomes of great importance. But the repetitive use of water-like words and phrases can also be used to draw a parallel between the desert and similar elements such as water (and perhaps the sky). They are all areas that seem to go on forever. They are so huge it becomes difficult to grasp them. They are never-ending spaces. 'In the desert it is easy to lose a sense of demarcation. When I came out of the air and crashed into the desert, into those troughs of yellow, all I kept thinking was, I must build a raft... And here, though I was in the dry sand, I know I was among water people' (18).¹¹ Almásy falls into a dreamlike state where he can flow freely in a space that lacks any kind of physical boundaries.

¹⁰ Fossilized shells are a common sight by the Atlas Mountains.

¹¹ The Cave of the Swimmers was a cave with prehistoric drawings of swimming figures. Almásy's discovery proved that in Tassali, 6000 years ago, there had been a lake where now there is dryness.

There are numerous metaphors of the breakdown of borders. One example of using fluid as a boundary-breaking element is when a Bedouin feeds him by chewing and softening a date before giving it to the patient. Almásy recalls ‘the taste of saliva that entered him along with the date’ (6). He is fed likewise by Hana, who tears off the skin of the plums with her teeth before passing them into his mouth. Images of water are presented more explicitly as Almásy is ‘swallowing [Hana’s] words like water’ (5). Mentioned throughout the novel, water represents something that can break down boundaries. It creates a borderless landscape which all the protagonists, in one way or another, long for. Both the desert and the sea are two landscapes that do not contain any visible or physical boundaries. They are areas where the invented concept of borders does not manifest itself as it does in inhabited landscapes. They give an impression of being huge and never-ending, resulting in a sense of freedom.

The English patient is the character who has reflected the most upon the dream of a world without borders.

There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I’ve met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states [...] The desert could not be claimed or owned – it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones [...] All of us [...] wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand. We left the harbours of oasis. The places water came to and touched. Erase the family name! Erase nations! [...] By the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation. (138 – 139)

Yet at the same time he also states that

We die containing the richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography – to be marked by nature, not just label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. (261)

Almásy realizes the interdependence between humans and territory. He wants freedom, yet he also desires to be marked by nature, by love, or perhaps by life. He understands the

necessity of nations, but he has also experienced its rough side in the cruellest way. Almásy is dual in his view of territories, borders, mapmaking, and ownership. Nothing has hurt him more and made him more jealous than seeing Katharine with other men. He wants to own her; he wants her to be his territory, and his awareness of his own cravings makes him crazy.

I will continue my examination of Almásy in the next chapter. But I will approach him from a different angle, that of the commonplace book. An analysis of the commonplace book will also result in a discussion of space from a different view, a metaphorical approach.

Chapter 3. The metaphorical space

Introduction

What has been explored so far is the topographical space, the physical space we are all familiar with. Our daily lives are filled with such spaces. This chapter will deal with another type of space, a variant of space that may not be so easily recognized. What happens when the borders of space become so blurred that they are no longer physical? Is it possible to transfer the concept of space onto a metaphorical level? I believe so, and this chapter will mainly focus on elements that validate my view. Almásy's commonplace book is the main object of research, a space that fits perfectly into the category of metaphorical space. A book is in opposition to the created rules people use when perceiving space. I will try to lay such rules and criteria aside as I will look at the metaphorical aspect of the book. I intend to bring up several issues that cross my path when examining the commonplace book as a space.

First of all, I will provide an analysis of the book in question. What sort of a book is this? What is its function and its origin? I will also look closer at the deterritorialized aspect of the book. I will provide an analysis of how the book has been transfused from one category into another or perhaps several. This, again, leads to a questioning of the borderlines of the text. What are the results of such borders? A discussion of this will inevitably result in an examination of intertextuality within the commonplace book, and *The English Patient* itself. The novel's literary self-consciousness will also be examined, since *The English Patient* contains many allusions to the process of reading and writing. As a result of the book's apparent self-awareness as a literary work of art, it is also necessary to touch upon the frequent use of prolepsis and ellipsis. How do these narrative terms affect the concept of

space? As mentioned earlier, I will start this chapter by examining Almásy's commonplace book as a physical, yet fictional, object.

The commonplace book

The name of the book is of great importance and is certainly not chosen at random. It is referred to as 'the commonplace book', indicating that it is a book where there is a space in which to put everything. The text inside has become a place, or a territory, free of borders. It allows everything from the outside to flood in. It is in this respect that I will try to present and explain my view of the commonplace book as a metaphorical space.

The Commonplace book is Almásy's only possession. It is 'the book he brought with him through the fire - [a 1890 edition of] *The Histories* by Herodotus that he has added to, cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing in his own observations – so they are all cradled within the text of Herodotus' (16). In other words, Almásy puts anything he finds interesting into the text of Herodotus. Sometimes he sticks pages from other books over the original text, creating a whole new interior. 'There is even a small fern glued into it' (98). He changes the text, the theme, and the narrative. The only thing making this new text coherent is the way its contents represents some aspect of Almásy. All pieces, chapters, words, pictures, writings, and so forth, are relevant to him. They are fragments he values and that mean something to him. A result of such a text is that it can reveal a lot of the character Almásy. It has become a space between two hard covers, containing highly personal information about its owner and (partly) creator.

Herodotus' book of histories and geographies is a very good choice to have as a commonplace book since it has a similar style to that of Almásy. The original book and

Almásy's edition are both inclusive works of art. Herodotus' book is inclusive in both themes and material as the narrative can be claimed to digress from the main topics.¹² Hana has

[...] never imagine[d] Herodotus this way. I see him more as one of those spare men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion, piecing together a mirage. 'This history of mine' Herodotus says, 'has from the beginning sought out the supplementary to the main argument.' What you find in him are cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history – how people betray each other for the sake of nations, how people fall in love...(119)

So the two books are quite similar in their wide range of contents. Both Herodotus and Almásy seem to embrace and include in their book what they find important. It is not my intension to compare Almásy and Herodotus when it comes to the ability to create a work of art. But I will like to draw a parallel between their approaches to writing. Almásy has not created a book; he has merely transformed *The Histories* into an even more multi-layered sample. He has inserted fragments of his life into the original text, hence created an open and inclusive genre, which I will like to be so bold as to state is in the spirit of Herodotus. Herodotus' text seems to be open to any interruption and digression, just as the commonplace book of Almásy.

As time goes by the patient discovers he has read a lot, speaks several languages and knows the location of the remotest places in the world.

I have always had information like a sea in me. I am a person who if left alone in someone's home walks to the bookcase, pulls down a volume and inhales it. So history enters us. I knew maps of the sea floor, maps that depict weaknesses in the shield of the earth, charts painted on skin that contain the various routes of the Crusades. (18)

His inexhaustible knowledge is revealed through the commonplace book, as it contains traces of foreign languages and the knowledge of ancient locations in the desert. Almásy has created a space within this book, a space containing fragments of his previous life. The patient lets Katharine and Hana look inside this book and by doing so he reveals glimpses of

¹² Fields of study that can be found in *The Histories* are geography, anthropology, ethnology, fables, and zoology. Herodotus has based his book on what he has seen himself and on sources given to him orally (Hertel 1985: 204).

the space that surrounds him. Readers of *The English Patient* are also able to peek inside his commonplace book as his narrative reveals aspects of its contents. The book symbolizes the true Almásy, the one he really is, and it is through this (partly autobiographic) book that Hana and Katharine are intrigued by him and understand more of him.

Any readers of Almásy's edition of *The Histories* will come across his supplementary additions that are either written in the margin or glued on top of the original texts. These supplementary fragments interrupt the narrative of Herodotus. I believe that if such digressions outnumber the real text (as it seems to have done in the commonplace book), the text will become a different kind of text, thus transgressing into a different kind of genre. Almásy lets his own voice become more audible than that of Herodotus by taking up much of Herodotus' space. There is a battle going on, a battle Herodotus, the father of history, is bound to lose (since he is not an active, nor present, participant). History is always based on the accounts of the ones who survive, who win, and who conquer successfully. Now it is Almásy's turn to tell the story. In one way, Almásy is an imperialist. Not only does he map the desert so that the superior west can orientate more easily. He also conquers the text of Herodotus and makes it his own by occupying and changing its original textual space.

I would like to draw a parallel between Almásy's additional material in the commonplace book and his narrative in the novel. Almásy not only lets his scribbling interrupt the original narrative of *The Histories*. He is also a character, whose narrative interferes with that of *The English Patient*. He plays a digressive role in the novel because his memories and stories deviate from life at the villa. He interrupts the narrative, takes over, and steers the reader into his world of mystique. The parallel narration (of life at the villa and in the desert) makes the text intriguing. It makes the reader curious and eager for any explanatory answers. The hunger for solutions becomes a driving force of the narrative. I am not neglecting the fact that all the characters bring in their own narrative as they all sink into

memories and thoughts. But I believe Almásy's interruptive narrative creates the deepest 'scar' of the story space. One would think such deviation would create incoherence.

However, Almásy's narrative creates coherence throughout the novel the way it continually interrupts the plot. He is the reason why Hana and Caravaggio are at the villa. He also plays an important role in their lives as a lot of the action taking place is related to him in one way or another. He plays the role of a mentor, a teacher, and a patient towards Hana. He fulfils the role of a companion towards Kip, and a possibly dangerous spy towards Caravaggio. In other words, he is attributed several roles that help to make the text coherent.

The commonplace book, on the other hand, is coherent in the way it has opened up its territory for everything. All kinds of fragments are embraced and included. It has become a text that holds anything or everything. What does this inclusiveness do to the text? I believe such open borders (of perhaps non-existent borders) inevitably lead to a process of deterritorialization.

Deterritorialization

The commonplace book has a highly inclusive narrative which problematises the text's borders. They are certainly not restrictive, as borders of most genres are. Perhaps one can compare the openness of the narrative to a stranded person on an island, overjoyed by everything that drifts ashore. The text's inclusive narrative and open borders subject it to undergo a process of deterritorialization. In chapter 1 I referred to Schimanski, who explains the term as being a result of a process of 'shifting in physical territories' (Schimanski 2001: 130). The commonplace book has transformed from one thing into another. It has changed its territory; thus emerged into something different than its origin. The process of deterritorialization has made it possible to see the book as a metaphorical space. A book is a physical object and is not usually perceived as being a territory or a space. But I also see the

book as a metaphorical object, as it contains a never-ending space of texts, intertextuality, fragments, memories, and so forth. Hana seems to see the book in the same deterritorialized light as she tells of

other books she had read to him whose landscapes they [had] already walked through. [...] When she begins a book she enters through stilted doorways into large courtyards. Parma and Paris and India spread their carpets. (93)

She perceives the text enclosed by the hard cover as a territory she can sink into. When she opens the book, she sees a world she can live in, float in, and experience, for a while. It is as if she sees it as a space existing simultaneously with the one she is physically placed within. She sees books as another universe, a universe she can explore by crossing its landscape and absorbing its atmosphere.

What happens when a text is deterritorialized and consists of a blend of genres?

Almásy's copy of *The Histories* has become something more than the original edition. He uses it as a personal diary, he adds pages from other texts he likes, he lets Katharine write in it, scraps of paper are glued into it, he adds maps to its contents, he uses it as a journal when he is out in the desert and has no where else to write, and so forth. I believe Almásy has created a book, or text, which is a clear and powerful instance of intertextuality, as it overflows the boundaries of other texts.

Intertextuality

...echo is the soul of the voice exciting itself in hollow places (250).

Intertextuality can be understood as a kind of echo, an echo of already existing texts, in the sense that any literary text is influenced by texts written before it. Even words are marked by previous interpretations and contexts. Words already have a meaning (Bakhtin 1970). *The English Patient* is crammed with quotations echoing themselves. I believe *The English*

Patient can be seen as an example of intertextuality, as it is made up of a mosaic of quotations. Any text is the ‘absorption and transformation of another’ (Kristeva 1980). *The English Patient* contains many different types of texts. We read bomb disposal manuscripts; we learn about winds of the Saharan desert and the history of the ancient people who used to live there; we are read parts of Herodotus’ *The Histories*; we read references to and extracts from Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*; Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, and so forth. Just like Almásy’s commonplace book it is a text invaded and deterritorialized by other texts. The commonplace book and *The English Patient* become meeting-points where contact is made between different types of texts.

We do not just read fragments of different texts mingled together; the narrative can also be seen as intertextual due to the fact that we are not just presented with one narration. As we read, Kip informs us of his past as a trainee of bomb disposal in England, Caravaggio tells of his adventures and why he has lost his thumbs, and Hana lets the reader get an insight of her past, of the time she nursed dying soldiers, and her relationship with Kip. Simultaneously, Almásy slowly reveals his life in the desert and his intense love affair with Katharine.

The English Patient is a very complex book as it uses features and characteristics from several genres. This is perhaps one reason why the book has a broad spectre of potential readers. It is interesting for the common reader because of its use of popular and well-known features from different genres. Yet it is also interesting for the academic reader as it includes different levels of meaning that may not be available to all readers (Stangebye 2000: 5 – 6). The different types of readers acknowledge the parts they can relate to. I believe Hana’s categorization of the commonplace book is a good example of how people perceive differently according to background and knowledge. She refers to the book as a ‘notebook’ (16). That is what the book is to her, just a book with Almásy’s ‘small gnarled handwriting’

(16). Almásy, on the other hand, writes, uses, and reads the book in different layers. It contains several levels of meaning. This ability is highly applicable to *The English Patient* as the novel too can be read and understood in different layers. One intertextual layer of *The English Patient* is the spy novel. Almásy's background is slowly revealed to us, and this becomes a driving force for the narrative. The reader becomes curious, and in want of a disclosure. The romantic novel is also included, with the passionate, yet hopeless, affair between Almásy and Katharine, and Hana and Kip.

Dimensions of intertextuality are represented in many ways in *The English Patient*. Hana reads to her faceless and nameless patient every day, but also on her own when he drifts away into his dream-like world.

So the books for the Englishman, as he listened intently or not, had gaps of plot like sections of a road washed out by storms, missing incidents as if locusts had consumed a section of tapestry, as if plaster loosened by the bombing had fallen away from a mural at night. (7)

But somehow it does not seem as if this bothers him. Perhaps he has read the books before and fills in the gaps with fragments from his memory, or maybe by his imagination.

If he happened to fall asleep she would continue, never looking up until she herself was fatigued. If he had missed the last half-hour plot, just one room would be dark in a story he probably already knew. He was familiar with the map of the story. (94)

Almásy mixes the texts read to him with his own imagination and recollections, hence a mosaic of echoes and articulations is being created within him.

The fragmented text

Genre is a very inclusive term. Bakhtin sees genre as something necessary for human interaction. We write according to conventional genres. We even speak according to whatever genre is suitable for the specific situation. We adapt our speech to the context we are placed within (as in a business meeting, at home, with friends, and so forth). We conduct

ourselves according to the current genre which can both be restrictive, and make it easier to express ourselves and be understood. Genre can be seen as a pair of glasses we look through in order to interpret the situation right and act accordingly. It is a way of expression and understanding. According to Bakhtin, genre is a tool used by any readers of a text. A text is not just made by an author, but also interpreted by a reader. The text becomes a meeting point for the author and reader, and both have as much influence on the text as the other (Bakhtin 1986: 47). There are always two voices in a text. No one owns the words. Yes, the author has placed them where they are and he/she has a message to convey, but it is important not to forget that words do not have one interpretation or one owner. The author always has to create a space of understanding. He/she writes with the intended reader in mind. In this respect, a text, or an utterance, becomes a meeting point (or perhaps a battle ground) between different participants on each end of the scale of the reading and writing process (Evensen et al. 1997: 46).

The English Patient has many postcolonial aspects. Critics within this field stress the fact that reading is a social activity that is influenced by a society beyond the author and reader, hence it is important to study narrative texts on the basis of our knowledge of such social activity (Lothe et al. 2001: 14). In other words: our reading of a text is coloured by our social and historical context. I find all this very interesting and relevant to the commonplace book and *The English Patient*. The novel itself is a text where Ondaatje writes with the intended reader and his/her social context in mind. Within this novel, we have another book, written by Almásy with perhaps only himself in mind. As readers of Ondaatje's novel we get small glimpses of what is written in the commonplace book. Ondaatje does not just present a book for us to read, he also presents a book within this book. *The English Patient* is strongly influenced by modernism, a literary period characterised by literary experimentation and an enhanced focus on time, memory, and the intricate workings of the human subject. The use of

the commonplace book highly affects the reading process as our curiosity of this book makes us forget the fictional world we are presented as we read. It can be seen as a tool to cover up, or perhaps make us forget, the meeting point between us, as readers, and Ondaatje, as author. It shifts the focus of the process we undergo as we read, and pulls us into a different world. As readers we partake in two parallel worlds: that of the real life and that of the novel. By including an element such as the commonplace book, Ondaatje brilliantly blurs this borderline and almost makes it invisible. Real life and the fictional world of the novel meet, and it is at this meeting-point we find ourselves situated as we read.

A fictional text is traditionally divided into chapters, scenes, descriptions, paragraphs and so forth. Such division creates order and a certain rhythm for the reader. Recurrent patterns (as for example grammatical repetition and temporal progression) create a structure, which is regulated by the author and translated and perceived by the reader. '[...] the author imposes on the reader a rhythm to which he has to submit like the listener who while listening to the rendering of a musical piece, has no option but to let himself be carried by the flow of notes towards the finale' (Clément 2004). In other words, the author has enormous power, as he/she has considerable, if not necessarily full, control of the text that is presented. The author's fictionalised text is usually surrounded by a time frame that implies order or an unfolding of sequences. Aristotle describes the plot as 'something which has a beginning, a middle, and an end [...] well constructed stories should not begin at random nor end at random' (Aristotle 1977: 11). *The English Patient* breaks with this apparent well-established tradition. It does not have a typical beginning, middle, and end. It starts in-medias-res, has several narrators, does not have a chronological development of the plot, and ends without a closure. Seen in this light, it is a story that seems rather chaotic. It is more like a brief insight of the lives of four people who met at a villa in Tuscany. Perhaps one can even read it as a presentation, or a fragment, of their lives, a glimpse of a few weeks where they all, in the end,

take a step in separate directions. *The English Patient* is nothing but a notion of fragmented narrative units. This can also result in the author losing some of his/her supreme power as the control of the text is weakened. The temptation of reading fragmented texts differently from the intended order increases for the reader, compared to that of more conventional and chronological texts.

Fragment is a genre that had its birth during the Romantic period. But it did not become an often-used genre until the era of modernism. Kafka is a famous author who is fond of using fragments.¹³ Unfortunately, he died before many of his texts were finished, and all his three novels are actually long fragments. He wanted his incomplete texts to be burned. Luckily they were not, and they are still with us today. The commonplace book and *The English Patient* have many similarities with the texts of Kafka. They all have the appearance of being neither totally structured nor totally unorganised. It is a collection of semi-organized fragments.

The commonplace book may be looked at in the light of what is mentioned above. As readers, we only get to know glimpses of this book as we overhear (or rather 'over-read') Hana or Katharine recite passages of texts, or Almásy read in it. We never get a chance to see it in its entirety. If anything is a collection of semi-organized fragments, it is the commonplace book. As a book within *The English Patient* it is supposed to be a real book. But as readers of the novel, we never get more information about it than through any descriptions provided by the narrator. As readers of *The English Patient* we are explorers of the text. We are explorers with perspectives in continuous movement according to whoever is narrating. As result the commonplace book acquires a fragmented appearance.

¹³ Fragments are both texts and imperfect texts.

The novel's literary self-consciousness

Books and the activity of reading play an essential part of the novel in a number of different ways. This was a time in Hana's life when books became a way to escape. Reading turns into a strategy of survival. But she also uses books in a physical way, as she finds them useful in order to mend the burned staircase. She also scribbles thoughts and anecdotes within them.

She opens *The Last of the Mohicans* to the blank page at the back and begins to write in it.... [*Caravaggio*] is in a time of darkness, has no confidence. For some reason I am cared for by this friend of my father. She closes the book and then walks down into the library and conceals it in one of the high shelves. (61) She walks in front of the shelves in the library, eyes closed, and at random pulls out a book. She finds a clearing between two sections in a book of poetry and begins to write there. (209, original emphasises)

In this way Hana is creating intertextuality. She scribbles words into random books, writing herself into poetry and novels. She evidently sees literature as being dynamic; something she can change by adding fragments of herself. But I believe her writing of anecdotes and thoughts into books is mostly a strategy of dealing with her trauma.

Literature can be used in a number of different ways. One can take advantage of its physical materiality and use it to repair staircases, or indulge in the literary universe between the covers. The novel seems to reflect upon literature. It claims that a 'novel is a mirror walking down a road' (91). People interpret things differently and analyse through experience and cultural background. Life in general is a tool which makes it possible for people to recognize and understand actions and thoughts of fictional characters. Just as the text of the novel echoes a mosaic of other texts, interpretations of the novel vary along with the diversity of its readers. In other words, what we see in a novel and our interpretations vary according to whose eyes we are looking through as we observe the 'mirror' (91) of the novel.

The novel is also self-conscious in the way it reflects upon its form as a literary text. In the following example, Hana refers to the use of first person narrative. 'Many books open

with an author's assurance of order. One slipped into their waters with a silent paddle' (93).

This is how she perceives texts in which the narrator intervenes the plot, hence creating a discourse space. It does not seem as if she is aware of any academic definitions or terms as she does not use them, but she does notice the literary phenomenon of a first person narrative as she comments the narrators' presence in the text. Hana also reflects upon different kinds of novels and their varying introductions as some 'novels commenced with hesitation or chaos. Readers were never fully in balance. A door a lock a weir opened and they rushed through, one holding a gunnel, the other a hat' (93).

What is mentioned thus far are examples of the protagonists' (and the novels') knowledge and observation of literature. But it is also important to mention that there is a self-conscious layer of meaning being communicated through the many references towards the process of reading and writing in general. Aspects of the reading and writing process are touched upon in a number of different ways. One example is where Almásy tells Hana to

Read him slowly, dear girl, you must read Kipling slowly. Watch carefully where the commas fall so you can discover the natural pauses. He is a writer who used pen and ink. He looked up from the page a lot, I believe, stared through his window and listened to birds, as most writers who are alone do. Some do not know the names of birds, though he did. Your eye is too quick and North American. Think about the speed of his pen. What an appalling barnacled old first paragraph it is otherwise. (94)

Almásy encourages Hana to visualize Kipling, as he is writing with his slow fountain pen, and to read the text along with his speed. The patient believes the text needs to be read slowly, and with a conscious eye for any natural pauses, such as commas, in order to take pleasure in what the text says. I believe this paragraph is a reminder from the author to the reader that even *The English Patient* needs to be read slowly in order to fully be able to enjoy the beautiful and poetic language, and grasp all levels of what is being conveyed. Ondaatje's language is very poetic and drenched with layers of meaning: an artistic brilliance that will be lost for the reader if read too fast. There are several lines from *The English Patient* that can

be used in order to illustrate Ondaatje's poetic language. His way of describing the long Cairo evenings is remarkable.

The sea of night sky, hawks in rows until they are released at dusk, arcing towards the last colour of the desert. A unison of performance like a handful of thrown seed. (161)

Another example, that I like in particular, is a diary-like extract:

There are betrayals in war that are childlike compared with our human betrayals during peace. The new lover enters the habits of the other. Things are smashed, revealed in new light. This is done with nervous of tender sentences, although the heart is an organ of fire. (97)

Just as Kipling has to be read with the speed of his fountain pen, this text too should be read with the speed of Almásy's handwriting. It is important to dwell upon the words in order to fully enjoy what is being communicated. Such poetic quality comes as no surprise, as Ondaatje is also a fine poet. He had his breakthrough as a poet long before he wrote *The English Patient*. In order to understand his ability as a poet, and the similarity of his poetry and the language in his novels, I will include one of his poems called 'Translations of my postcards'

the peacock means order
the fighting kangaroos mean madness
the oasis means I have struck water

positioning of the stamp – the despot's head
horizontal, or 'mounted policemen',
mean political danger

the false date means I
am not where I should be

when I speak of the weather
I mean business

a blank postcard says
I am in the wilderness
(Ondaatje 1989: 170)

Such poetic discourse conveys no action. The words are descriptive and filled with emotion.

The lines and words have a surplus in meaning. When used in poetry they obtain a richer

meaning than when used in prose. Ondaatje has transferred such enriching language into his novel, hence given his language a poetic quality. Stangebye states that such language, which does not intently lead towards the closure of the novel, carry a layer of meaning on its own. She claims that these elements are pictures in the text. These pictures come into being through the written words (Stangebye 2000: 37). This applies perfectly to Ondaatje's writing as he writes in an extraordinary picturesque and poetic way. These pictures are created by words that have an extensive function, words that refer to something more than just its literal meaning. They create a space in which a further meaning or reference may be conveyed.

Having examined self-conscious literary elements within the text, I will now move on to literary terms that are complementary narrative variants: analepsis and prolepsis. To a certain extent these terms correspond to 'flashback' and 'foreshadowing' which implies a space of the past and a space of the future.

Analepsis – a space of the past

'Analepsis is and evocation of story-event at a point in the text where later events have already been related, i.e. the narration jumps back to an earlier point in the story before the main narrative starts' (Lothe 2000: 54). Analepsis has a significant impact on the narrative of *The English Patient* as all the characters at the villa have flashbacks. Their narrative jumps back to a time outside and prior to the time of the main narrative. As this thesis has shown, the use of analepsis is strongly attached to the character Almásy. He contributes greatly to the creation of a space of the past, as he plunges into his memories. He tells of his life in the desert and in Cairo, which takes place prior to the narrative frame. Hana, Kip, and Caravaggio all have analeptic narratives as they narrate events that have occurred before the time of the main narrative. This results in an awareness (for the reader) that the characters, at an earlier stage, have partaken in different spaces than the one presented as the narrative

frame. Minghella's adaptation of *The English Patient* uses analepsis to such an extent that the original emphasis given to the narrative frame in Ondaatje's novel is weakened. Almásy's flashbacks of the desert are given more weight in the film than in the novel. Hence, his analepsis creates a more dominating space than that of the villa in the film. (I will discuss this issue further in chapter 4). Analepsis is a common narrative variant and functions as a supplement to the main narrative. Prolepsis, on the other hand, occurs more seldom.

Prolepsis – a space of the future

After having examined the space of the past I will move on to another space I find highly significant and interesting; namely the space of the future. This is done through the use of a 'figurative device by which future events is presumed to have happened' (Cuddon 1999: 702). Such a narrative manoeuvre is called prolepsis and 'consists in evoking in advance an event that will take place later' (Lothe 2000: 55). *The English Patient* has many examples of such anticipation as the narrator lets the reader get a glimpse of the future.

Prolepsis is a tool to create a space of the future. It is a world we get to sense as the narrator reveals what is to come. 'Years from now on a Toronto street Caravaggio will get out of a taxi and hold the door open for an East Indian who is about to get into it, and he will think of Kip then' (208). As readers we get to know that Caravaggio will live for many years and that he has retreated to his home country. It is as if we are given the ability to peek into the future through Ondaatje's foretelling. Although we are not given a descriptive passage of a certain space, prolepsis tells of a time that is to come, a space that will exist in the future. Another example of prolepsis is when Almásy 'whispers again, dragging the listening heart of the young nurse beside him to wherever his mind is, into that well of memory he kept plunging into those months before he died' (4). Ondaatje reveals, as early as on page four that

Almásy is going to die. This is quite risky as he represents a character whose destiny is one of the main propels of the narrative (and for the reader). By telling us that he is to die, the reader is left with no hope that this sympathetic, yet enigmatic, character will have enough time to find a space of his own or happiness with another person as he once had. One effect of such revelation is that we become more curious of why he does not seem too troubled by the fact that he is to die. We eagerly read on in order to find an answer to why he no longer has anything to live for. This question becomes a driving force of the narrative; it keeps the reader going, in search of an answer. Hence prolepsis can be seen as a mind-teaser as it foretells of a time and space that will come and this inevitably leads to a lot of unanswered questions that will make the reader hunger for more information in search of answers.

We are also told of Hana and how she will ‘realize he never allowed himself to be beholden to her, or her to him’ (128). We get a glimpse of truths she will discover when it comes to her relationship with Kip. Such a prolepsis in the narrative is very informative for the reader as it hints how things will be in the future. It creates a dimension, a space, which we, as readers, know will come.

Prolepsis may also underline the impact of certain experiences we undergo as humans. Some experiences can be cruel and give incurable wounds. ‘Years after the war a sapper putting a pen on a table would position it with the thicker end facing four o’clock’ (275). We are told of sappers who years after the war has ended still find objects, which are placed at random or at a different location than their natural habitation, suspicious. War and traumatic events give scars that never go away. In this case, prolepsis works as a tool to illustrate the impact these events will have on people in the future. It collapses events, time and space into an inseparable relationship.

Ellipsis

Another literary element I find very interesting is that of leaving text out. In spite of what might seem like an ability to make a text incoherent, the omission of information can create a flow in the narrative. It is not always necessary to state everything explicitly. Pictures created by the reader can sometimes say more and be more powerful than words.

[...] a painting is mute poetry, while poetry is a talking painting...¹⁴

The narrative is mostly propelled by what is stated explicitly. But leaving information out can also be an efficient way to convey meaning and promote the narrative. Ellipsis means that something is being omitted (Cuddon 1999: 256), leaving 'zero textual space' (Lothe 2000: 59). There are many examples of ellipsis in the text. The narrator highlights these by jumping over several lines before commencing on a different story, as in the following example:

Hana listened as the Englishman turned the pages of his commonplace book and read information glued in from other books – about great maps lost in bonfires and the burning of Plato's statue, whose marble exfoliated in the heat, the cracks across wisdom like precise reports across the valley as Poliziano stood on the grass hills smelling the future. Pico down there somewhere as well, in his grey cell, watching everything with the third eye of salvation.

He poured some water into a bowl for the dog. An old mongrel older than the war.
[...] (58).

This shows how the narrative jumps from Hana and Almásy to Caravaggio. Sometimes the events go on simultaneously (as perhaps in this example), or follow one another chronologically, or differ many years in time. This is usually not stated explicitly; hence the narrator puts the reader in command of placing the different sections into their right place.

It seems as if the novel has a weakness for jumping back and forth in time, making it the readers' responsibility to place all the fragments chronologically. I see this as one of the

¹⁴ My translation of a quote made by Semonides from Keos, referred to by Stangebye 2000: 37.

strengths of the novel as it functions like a Chinese box. Piece by piece we get to discover and open new wells within the characters and the story space, which slowly leads us to the innermost box; the driving force of the narrative and its characters.

Ellipsis creates a puzzle. The reader has to identify the different pieces and place them right. This results in layers of meaning. Each reader is entitled to identify and place the pieces where they find them suitable. On the one hand, the novel is steered by a narrative course that mainly explores Almásy's identity (and the other protagonists' identity). On the other hand, the novel contains a narrative where the tempo is slower, where no action is being conveyed and where what is being narrated seems like a frozen moment. But these moments also work as a tool to express a narrative, since they form a level of meaning. Atle Kittang states that this meta-narrative level makes it possible for the reader to distance him/her self. It makes it possible for the reader to reflect differently from the fictional characters; he/she is given a space in which the protagonists are unable to infiltrate (Kittang 1998: 13-16).

In this chapter I have tried to examine of the commonplace book as a metaphorical space. The book is ascribed a three-dimensional appearance, yet what we read are only fragments. This chapter has analysed these fragments as being the foundation of a metaphorical space. But how is this ability affected when moved onto the screen? I will now move on to Minghella's adaptation of *The English Patient*.

Chapter 4. Space within film

Introduction

A literary text and film are two highly distinctive media. They are vehicles that have two completely different sets of machinery that process a story to an audience. This thesis has so far had its main focus on the concept of space in Ondaatje's novel. I wish to further explore this theme and examine it in the light of Minghella's film version, also titled *The English Patient*. By doing so, I find it natural to discuss how space appears on film compared to its appearance in a literary texts. I also intend to examine how film conveys space, and whether or not its execution is similar to, or different from, literary creation of space. I find it necessary to look at adaptation in general and ascertain differences and similarities within writing and film as two distinctive art forms, before I start discussing the issues mentioned above.

Michael Ondaatje has written a book about the conversations he had with the film and sound editor Walter Murch. Their exchange reveals behind-the-scene glimpses of the different working styles of several directors. Walter Murch¹⁵ is one of many that contributed in the making of *The English Patient*. He states that a 'film is born three times – in the writing of the script, in the shooting, and in the editing. With *The English Patient* there were, in fact, four births, because there was also a book as the source' (Ondaatje 2002: xix). How does this complex process affect the transition of certain features of a text into film? I will focus on three main areas of space within *The English Patient*. In order to be able to make a more clear cut comparison between text and film I have chosen to focus on the same spatial

¹⁵ Walter Murch was also a personal friend of Ondaatje. Minghella says that 'among the many things Walter has taught me is the necessity for every element in the film to work, and to be working in concert' (Ondaatje 2002: 276).

locations as in chapters two and three; namely the topographical space of the Villa San Girolamo, the desert, and the metaphorical space of the commonplace book.

Since film is a very different medium from that of the written word, I feel it is important to examine how different elements of film are executed. How does film transfer and translate events, characters, characteristic features, and the verbal language of *The English Patient*? Is it possible to adapt a writer's tone and voice when transferring his/her words into screen picture and motion? And most importantly, how is the creation of space executed within film? I wish to discuss these complex issues and support my view by providing examples from *The English Patient's* adaptation and screenplay. I will start this chapter by giving a brief introduction to the 'language' of film.

Film language

'Film is unique among art forms in its ability to display space. A camera shot in film is as rich in connotations as a sentence, perhaps a paragraph' (Lothe).¹⁶ I believe this statement to be true. A scene, or just a second of a scene, is so full of detailed information, which is not possible to present in the same way in writing.¹⁷ To write every detail of a scene would create pages of description, something that will make the text too dense for a common reader. Film and writing can be seen as two different languages. Walter Murch comments on this as he

[...] compared the process of film adaptation to translation, in the sense that many of the decisions you make – when you go from a book to a script and then from a script to shooting and from shooting to editing – are like translating from one language to another, from the language of words to the language of images and sounds. But there is naturally within each language a different emphasis on certain things. You have to take that difference into account when you translate from one language to another. (Ondaatje 2002: 144)

¹⁶ Quote taken from an essay written by Jakob Lothe, distributed to the class of Narrative in Fiction and Film, spring 2003.

¹⁷ A film is usually shot and projected at a rate of 24 frames per second (Bordwell et al. 1997: 4).

In the light of this statement, I would like to call this language of images and sounds a film language. Like any other language, this language is made by and on behalf of its users; namely the creators of film and its audience. As a result of all these different stages a text must go through in order to become a filmic language, it is almost impossible to make the original text and the film alike. There are elements and meaningful effects that are not covered linguistically in the different languages of prose and film. One can compare this dilemma to human languages as words and phrases of one language are non-existent in other languages. How does this problematic aspect of transition affect the translation of Ondaatje's novel into film? There are 'words and phrases' of the novel that are non-existent in the film and vice versa. In the following subchapter, I will look more closely at some illustrative examples.

Differences between the book and the film

Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Minghella's *The English Patient* vary in a number of different ways. The problems of adapting novels into film can be many, as books and film often tend to make bad marriages.

The most frequent problem is abundance. The amount of story in a novel is so much more than a film can present. [...] As a rule, when you're adapting a novel to film, you have to ask, What's the short story of this novel? And then make certain fateful decisions. (Ondaatje 2002: 126)

The most important change of *The English Patient* is that the narrative frame has been 'hushed down' in the film. In the novel, the villa is the spatial location of the narrative frame. Most of the film's story space is also located at the villa. But the villa's narrative frame is more blurred in the film. Protagonists are given more freedom; they are allowed to move in time and space without as much restriction as the narrative frame has in the novel. As a result Kip and Hana's relationship (which takes place at the villa) becomes secondary to that of

Almásy and Katharine. The film has reduced the role of Kip as a postcolonial element, and time spent on the dramatic plot taking place in the desert, has increased considerably from the novel.

Events from the novel are transferred and translated into filmic scenes; hence their appearance has changed. One example of events that are executed differently in the book and film is the time it takes Almásy to rescue his lover (three years in the novel, only a few days in the film). It is important to keep in mind that film must be sellable. It has to be seen and reach a certain amount of people in order to survive economically. Hence they must attract a wide range of spectators. I believe Minghella has changed the time it took Almásy to save Katharine as a result of the necessity to reach a mass audience. His grief becomes more understandable and sellable to an audience when we are made to believe that he is only a couple of days too late. It becomes more heartbreaking.

The visual screen of the cinema has an easy access to our emotions, more so than writing. The kinetic power of film is extraordinary. Film has the power to influence us, positively or negatively, in a way that makes it harder for us to suppress what is being conveyed due to its realistic appearance. Manipulative effects, such as sound and music, trigger and guide our emotions to what is intended in the different sequences. I am not saying that we are not affected when reading love stories or tragedies, but it is easier to ignore a tragedy in the newspaper after having read about it, than if we saw it on a screen. Film's unique capacity for making everything perceptible to the eye leaves no room for censoring in the mind. What we see is what we see.¹⁸ When reading, however, we have to visualize for ourselves. In this respect, Minghella was right in changing the time it took Almásy to get back to Katharine. I do not think the beauty and despair would be the overruling emotion if

¹⁸ Unless we close our eyes and let our imagination take over, which at times can be even more frightening due to soundtrack and other cinematic features.

one of the last scenes of the film were of Almásy and a three-year-old corpse falling apart in a plane flying over the desert.

Another example of how events from the novel are changed when translated into film is how Almásy's plane crashes. In the novel his plane burns because it leaks fuel, while in the film he is once again a victim of nationality (his plane is shot down by Germans because they think he is English, flying an English plane).¹⁹ Hence, in this particular scene, a bigger emphasis is put on the issue of nationality within the film.

Yet another example is Kip and Hana's future. In the book, Kip leaves in anger, and it is clear by the prolepsis in the end of the novel that he and Hana will never see each other again.

He sits in the garden. And he watches Hana, her hair longer, in her own country. And what does she do? He sees her always, her face and body, but he doesn't know what her profession is or what her circumstances are. [...] This is a limited gift he has somehow been given, as if a camera's film reveals her, but only her, in silence. (300)

In the film, however, their future is left open. There is even a slight hint that they will get back together by the fact that Kip left for Florence and in the last scene Hana gets a ride with a car that is going to Florence. Yet the greatest change between the novel and the film is the latter's removal of the atomic bomb.

The film was so much about those five individual people: the Patient, Hana, Kip, Katharine, Caravaggio – that to suddenly open it up near the end and ask the audience to imagine the death of hundreds of thousands of unknown people ... It was too abstract. So the bomb of Hiroshima became the bomb that killed Hardy, someone you knew, [...] which sends Kip, at the death of his friend, into a state of depression that even his love for Hana cannot rouse him from – this similar, more personal crisis could serve as the template. (Ondaatje 2002: 213)

This necessary removal weakens the postcolonial aspect. By deleting Kip's reaction to the atomic bomb a dimension, which greatly colours the novel, is lost within the film. The removals, changes, and additions mentioned thus far are all results of the difficult task of

¹⁹ There is great irony or perhaps tragedy in the fact that he traded this plane from the Germans, since the English thought he was a traitor. He was a Hungarian citizen flying an English plane with German fuel borrowed from the Germans and shot down by Germans because they believed he was English.

translating a literary text into film. How then does the transition of a work of art into another format affect a phenomenon such as space? How is it possible to translate literary space into filmic space?

The creation of space within film

As mentioned above, film and text are two distinctly different media. Film is a medium that needs plot progression in order to hold on to an audience. We have seen in chapter 2, that as we are given descriptions of space, all action is usually taken out. We are left in a frozen moment where only a description is given. But film's lasting need for progression makes the freezing of all action difficult to achieve. Within film, one can freeze images, but not 'violate the law of continuity' (Bellour 2000: 2). As a result, there is usually something in motion when a space is shown to an audience. There does not have to be much action; a character could be walking around or staring at something etc. But the pure description, which is possible in a book, is usually left out when transferred into film. 'Shots related in a stable chain define 'locale'. They give the audience a concrete sense of place, the experience of which leads to the narrative nuances of the story' (Jesionowski 1987: 101). In the early films, action in one scene would be matched in the following scene.²⁰ This was done in order to create a sense of coherence between the different scenes, as matched 'action suggests that all the shots belong to the same 'world'' (Jesionowski 1987: 101).

'The image projected over a screen is flat, of course, and it displays a composition within a frame, just like a still photograph or a painting would' (Bordwell et al. 1997: 190). The space of the story is usually the same space as that of the plot. But sometimes the plot includes spaces that are a part of the story, but not shown on the screen. One could say that

²⁰ This could be done by having characters in one scene walk in the same direction as the characters in the following scene, or by having a character leave the screen on the left side and making another character appear on the same side in the following scene, and so forth.

the narrative demands us to imagine these spaces or actions. Film, as well as literary texts, include story space and discourse space. But cinema also employs screen space, which is the visible space within the frame.

The arrangement of the mise-en-scene²¹ creates the composition of the *screen space*. That two-dimensional composition consists of the organization of shapes, textures and patterns of light and dark. In most films, though, the composition also represents a *three dimensional space* in which the action occurs. (Bordwell et al. 1997: 190, original emphases)

Since the image projected over the screen is two-dimensional, the director uses the mise-en-scene in order to enable the audience to infer with the three-dimensionality of the scene.

Elements are placed in front of the camera in order to emphasize, or create a sense, that the screen has a depth, a three-dimensional space. '[...] our vision is attuned to changes of several kinds: *movement, colour differences, balance of distinct components, and variations in size* (Bordwell et al. 1997: 190, original emphases). As viewers we are very sensitive to these changes and this gives power to the director as he/she can direct our attention across the two-dimensional space of the frame.

I will briefly consider the concept of screen space, before I further explore the term in relation to *The English Patient*. What makes us perceive a screen as being three-dimensional? How is depth within a picture created? The answer to these questions is the use of depth cues. There is no real space behind the screen, although the screen gives an appearance that there is. Depth cues make us imagine that the screen is a three-dimensional space. Our perception of such depth cues is a result of our experience of space in the real world. It is also a result of our understanding of conventions of space in art forms like paintings and theatre. Within film: shading, setting, shape, movement, and costumes create depth cues. They create a sense that the film has a volume (Bordwell et al. 1997: 190-193).

²¹ Mise-en-scene are 'all the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed: the settings and props, lighting, costumes and make-up, and figure behaviour' (Bordwell et al. 1997: 480).

‘Almost invariably, a *moving* item draws out attention more quickly than a static item does. We are sensitive to even the slightest activity within the frame’ (Bordwell et al. 1997: 190, original emphasis). If everything on a screen is still except for one thing, for example a bird flying or a paper blowing, this will immediately catch our attention. If there are several things or characters moving, for example people dancing or balls bouncing, our attention will shift among them according to where we expect the relevant action to take place.

Screen space can also be created through a contrast of colours. This is the technique of many painters who want to create a three-dimensional painting. Bright colours put in front of more subdued colours is more likely to draw our attention. Colours affect our ability to visualize. If everything shown on a screen is in black and white, even a tiny coloured detail will automatically draw our attention. Such usage of contrast is very efficient and will usually make the viewer attribute great importance to whatever is distinguished by the use of a contrasting colour (Bordwell et al. 1997: 190-193). This is not a technique that is much used in *The English Patient*. However, it is highly significant that the memories of the desert and the love scenes between Katharine and Almásy always appear in a warm sandy coloured haze. In my view, this is done in order to emphasize the intimacy between Almásy and the desert, and between Almásy and Katharine. Minghella has placed them within a warm-coloured shade in order to express their unspoken passion. The desert could also be shown in such a shade in order to mirror its beauty in accordance with reality. As the winds of Sahara play with the sand, the landscape will dress in a shade of sandy orange.

Another element that contributes to the development of screen space is the use of balancing. Many filmmakers assume that spectators mostly focus on the upper half of the screen, since this is usually the location of the characters’ facial expressions. This means that the director should not place too many objects in this space, since that would only be confusing for the spectators. But the filmmaker usually tries to balance the right and left

halves of the screen (this, of course, does not have to be done symmetrically). A loose balance will create a sense of harmony within the screen; hence the spectator will be left to concentrate on what the director wants to communicate. ‘The simplest way to achieve compositional balance is to centre the frame on the human body. Filmmakers often place a single figure at the centre of the frame and minimize distracting elements at the sides’ (Bordwell et al. 1997: 192). Compositional balance is a technique that will create expectations and direct the spectator to where the significant action (in accordance to the narrative) will take place.

Variation in size of any objects or characters is also a technique that encourages spectators to perceive the screen as being three-dimensional. Larger shapes will usually be noticed before smaller ones, and if two figures have the same shape, but different size, one will immediately assume that the smaller one is further behind in the screen space (Bordwell et al. 1997: 192). All the techniques of creating screen space, as discussed above, are used in the creation of space within *The English Patient*. I will now move on to the examination of the spatial location of the Villa San Girolamo.

The Villa San Girolamo

Ondaatje’s novel contains many purely descriptive sentences and paragraphs about this villa.

Descriptive paragraphs are also included in Minghella’s screenplay.

Ext. The monastery. Day.

Hana is investigating the Monastery of S. Anna, wandering through its overgrown gardens, past a pond. What sanctuary it seems to offer.

Int. The monastery library. Day.

Hana explores via a gaping hole in a library where the walls have collapsed from shelling. The garden intrudes, ivy curls around the shelves. Bloated books lie abandoned, and there’s a piano tilted up on one side. Hana presses the keys through filthy tarpaulin which covers it. Everywhere there are signs of a brief German occupation. (Minghella 1997: 16-17, original emphases)

Such descriptive scenes are also present in the film, but here they also contain some element of action. The following example will illustrate this point. The villa very much resembles the descriptions given in the book by Michael Ondaatje. It is a shattered villa located in the green surroundings of the Tuscan landscape. It is presented as a villa greatly damaged due to war as walls are missing, windows are broken, and so forth. One scene that illustrates the damaged building in accordance to Ondaatje's spirit is when Kip arrives for the first time at the villa. He hears Hana play the piano and runs towards her in order to stop her (in case it has been mined). The camera's position enables us to see him running towards Hana through a wall that has been blown away. Beside this torn wall is a door. Instead of entering through the huge entrance of the non-existent wall, he walks a bit further in his attempt at entering through the door.

Int. Monastery library. Day.

Hana plays. A gunshot punctuates the music. Her hands falter, she looks up to see a Sikh soldier running past the gaping hole in the wall, his rifle held aloft. He approaches the French doors, his face creased with anxiety, and raps on the shattered frame. It's Kip, the bomb disposal officer who had cleared the road on which Jan's jeep had exploded.

Kip: Stop playing! Please, stop playing!

Hana (*of the doors*): I don't have the key to that door.

She watches him walk around from the locked doors and walk straight through the hole in the wall, oblivious to any irony, and up to the piano. (Minghella 1997: 52-53, original emphases)

Still, in the shattered period of the end of the Second World War, the protagonists try to act as human as possible by holding on to their civilized customs of entering through doors even though the marks left by the war has made scars (such as missing walls) that would be easier to use.

As mentioned before, a lot of the plot takes place at the villa. This is the space where the English patient drifts between past memories and present life. Hence many transitions between scenes are made at the villa. Minghella uses a number of different techniques in order to make the continuous changing of scenes more natural. He is a master at transforming

what could be perceived as abrupt shifting of scenes into scenes that float into each other.

This flow of scenes is a result of his magnificent ability to transform the film into waves that just keep rolling, as if it were the most natural thing to do.

The shifting of scenes

One of the film's strengths is its shifting of scenes. The film, just like the book, is not structured chronologically. Hence the director is given the opportunity to shuffle scenes around. Such flexibility opens up for a tremendous amount of possible executions.

Minghella's film has fraction-like sequences where the focus shifts between Hana and Almásy (and Caravaggio and Kip) at the villa, and Almásy's life in Cairo and in the desert. It gives a very fragmented appearance, which is in accordance with the original text by Ondaatje.

[...] there's a double variability – you're going backwards and forwards into several different time frames, and the point of view is not fixed: you can jump to a scene between Caravaggio and Hana as easily as you can to one between Kip and the Patient. Yet they're all in the same environment. (Ondaatje 2002: 157)

The scenes can jump back and forth in both location and time, but they are still interrelated by the fact that they include the same characters. The characters have separate stories to tell, but during the course of the novel and film their stories melt together, as all the protagonists at some point meet mentally or spatially. The scenes are related in the way they are told from the same spatial location, namely the villa. But how does Minghella shift from scene to scene when they are situated differently in both time and space?

The uses of sound within film

Minghella uses both visible and audible effects in order to prepare the audience for the shifting of scenes. I am tempted to suggest that sound is half the experience in the medium of film, as it develops and reinforces emotions; be that of the dramatic, tragic, comic, or romantic kind. 'It is [by the use of sound] that much of the [...] influence on the audience [...] is subliminal' (Ondaatje 2002: xvi). The combination of the visual and sound is one factor that determines whether a film is really successful or not. One such audible preparation of a scene shift in *The English Patient* is when a distant bell can be heard as the patient eats a plum.

[...] we had put in the sound of a bell a distance away, about half a mile. It was to hint at a memory opening up. The Patient as he eats his plum begins to remember [...]. The bell we hear signals the past for him; it takes over from the plum's taste as the catalyst of that memory. (Ondaatje 2002: xvi)

The sound of the bell is the first positive human sound in the film. For the first fifteen minutes all human sounds have been bombs or machine guns or crashing trains and planes.

There are many examples of sound being an interlinking element in the transitions of *The English Patient* (which, of course, is non-existent within writing).

[...] many of the visual cuts from location to location were slightly foreshadowed by a sound cut: we could now hear the noise of sandpaper on stone, for instance, before we cut visually to the archaeologists in the desert [...]. (Ondaatje 2002: xvi)

At one stage the sound of Kip's motorbike results in Almásy's mind wandering off to a time he was driving a jeep in Cairo. The sound triggers Almásy's mind and past memories into taking over the narrative.²² Another example of sound as a trigger of transition is the soft clang of a metal piece, thrown by Hana as a hopscotch token, which evolves into the sound of Berber music, thus preparing us for a leap back in Almásy's memory.

²² This happens again and again, which might make us speculate on the degree of his consciousness or self-control. Does it just happen or does he *let* it happen? He is after all reduced to an unrecognisable burned patient in bed.

[...] the film dissolves through to the scene where the explorers, in an earlier time, are sitting around the campfire and the Berber guides are playing their music and you realize that elements of this drumming have infiltrated their way into the hopscotch, and that that's probably what triggered this memory within Almásy. (Ondaatje 2002:124)

Something about the rhythmic sound made by Hana, or perhaps the rarity of the clanging sound, takes him into the past. Ondaatje calls such sound 'metaphorical sound', and he believes that this helps to reach 'a deeper truth about the atmosphere of the scene' (Ondaatje 2002: 124). I think this is true as all these sounds reveal aspects of the different characters. Hana is twenty years of age, yet she plays hopscotch. The scene reveals her retreat from adult life, which is a result of her traumas. And the fact that the patient lets such sounds trigger his mind in wandering off reveals his unclear (or perhaps nonexistent) borderline between past and present.

The most powerful scene, where music plays a very significant role, is the love scene between Almásy and Katharine at the Christmas party.

[...] it was the use of a remade soundtrack that capsized the sounds of the good-natured Christmas spirit outside their room; [Murch] had added the noise of jostled furniture, the hint of bridles, and other sounds that made the scene dangerous. He had made the soundtrack a debate between a passionate private music and the carol-singing, social world close by. (Ondaatje 2002: xvii)

This scene is a very dramatic and dangerous one. Katharine and Almásy are an adulterous couple making love in a semi-public place. If anyone came at the wrong time and discovered them, the result would be disastrous. The scene is sexually charged and intertwined with a notion of danger. The many layers of music enhance this ambience.

Not only is there complexity in the physical geography of the party – how they meet, what he says to her, and where they go – the *soundscape* of that scene is very complex. There is Arabic music and there are people singing Christmas carols, improbably, in Cairo. A very English party. Then there is the love theme, the orchestral music. (Ondaatje 2002: 304, original emphasis)

The music is mingled together and sometimes one of them is louder than the others, enhancing the notion of love, or danger, according to the type of music. Such a blend of

different musical genres engenders a notion of chaos. Such an atmosphere of chaos reflects the relationship between Almásy and Katharine, as neither seem to have an idea where they are heading. They seem to be an adulterous couple unable to resist the tide, as they are slaves to their passionate hunger for each other. Minghella manages to capture this passionate, yet doomed relationship through the mingling of music when showing the intense love scene.

Music is not just added to the film from the outside. Sometimes music is part of the ‘reality’ of the scene. At one stage Caravaggio plays Benny Goodman’s jazz for the patient. First it sounds as if it is part of the soundtrack, but then we see him change records. Such events make music become something ‘more than an outside force – it grounds the music in the actual scene’ (Ondaatje 2002: 171). One result of such use of sound is the creation of closeness between the characters on the screen and the spectators. As spectators we get a feeling that we are part of the audience or listeners within the movie along with the patient. We get a notion we are included.

An inevitable result of using music and sound as a linking element within film is that silence becomes incredibly powerful.²³ ‘Murch always tries to find a moment in his films when [the] shock of silence will fill the theatre’ (Ondaatje 2002: xxi). In *The English Patient* that moment comes when Caravaggio is being interrogated and he for the second time begs the interrogator not to cut him. Up till this point numerous levels of sound have been given in order to make the scene of the cave-like interrogation room realistic. The air inside this room is filled with the continual typing, the fly buzzing, and the phone that keeps ringing. Even sound taking place outside the room has been included, such as a firing squad and soldiers yelling. As a response to Caravaggio’s plea, all sound is pulled out of the scene and the audience is left in complete silence. The silence becomes dangerous. Time stops and the audience immediately know that the officer has to execute his threat of cutting Caravaggio’s

²³ The use of silence in movies did not exist until the invention of synchronous sound in 1927. Until then there was the continuous accompaniment of music: live orchestra, organ, or piano (Ondaatje 2002: xxi).

thumbs off. This awareness makes the audience prepare themselves for the gruesome act that is to come.²⁴

There is also shifting of scenes where the audible becomes secondary to the visible. These shifts are magnificent and representative of Minghella's artistic abilities. One is where the English patient is looking at his commonplace book, trying to reach it. Due to his, at times, uncoordinated movements (caused by his badly burned body) it drops to the floor and all the loose pages inside lie scattered on the floor. Minghella's intention with this incident could be to compare Almásy's situation to that of a child's when walking into a candy store; the patient can pick and choose between the memories that lie on the floor, and the piece that is the most eye-catching is the one he chooses. His eyes fall on a paper that is part of a firecracker, and as spectators we sink with him into his memories of a Christmas party in Cairo.

Another very effective shift of scenes is when Almásy flies over the desert. The camera has a high angle as it moves its focus from the plane and onto the desert. It obtains the same view as Almásy would, if he had looked down. The ground contains many slopes and curves. Then the sandy colour of the desert changes and becomes greyer, and suddenly we realize that the camera has moved from the beautiful landscape of the desert to that of Almásy's blanket, covering him, as he lies in his bed at the villa. This camera shot is highly poetic, in a way far beyond the ability of words. I feel this does justice to the original text of Ondaatje's poetic language. His writing is not easily translatable as it cannot function as speech in the film, but this is justified by the beautiful and artistic use of the camera. The photo shoot of the film does justice to the sublime language of Ondaatje.

Another example that illustrates the advantage of visible communication (something that is impossible for a literary text to achieve) and where sound plays a secondary role is the

²⁴ We only hear the suggestions of violence; nothing violent is actually shown on the screen.

dance between Almásy and Katharine. A very substantial part of all communication is communicated through body language. Film has a unique opportunity to place and convey meaning through the different characters' facial expressions, eye movements, body posture, and so forth. When Almásy and Katharine dance together they almost hang on to each other. It is a formal dance and social conventions force them to move in a certain way. Their bodies have to face each other and they must cooperate in order to dance appropriately. This has to be done even if they do not like each other. Only by looking in a different direction or turning ones head can the dance partners avoid confrontation. Simultaneously with the restricted and customary performance of the dance there is a change going on, a battle in their relationship.

We wondered why Katharine would dance with Almásy – she could have said, No, I'm tired, but she accepted. She's obviously attracted to him, but afraid of that attraction. So she spends a certain amount of time during the dance not looking at him. She's talking to him but not looking at him. Then, since her body is forced to face him, the moment that she *does* look at him becomes very powerful. The only freedom of movement she has is either to avert her eyes or to gaze at him. [...] Katharine's words can be, I hate you – but I'm not looking at you, which means I'm actually saying I love you. And my body is facing you, so I really do love you. (Ondaatje 2002: 302)

Although they do not say much explicitly, they conduct a whole conversation with their body posture and eye movements, a conversation we as viewers can only guess at. A result of not having direct speech or a voiceover telling us what is going on we, as spectators, have to interpret on the same terms as the characters involved. They too must guess at the meaning being conveyed through the other's body language. Geoffrey watches them, but we do not know if he is suspicious of his wife's fondness of Almásy or if he is just admiring her dancing skills. Maybe he, along with the audience in the cinema, is just trying to figure out what is going on.

In my view, Minghella has combined the visual and the audible in an artistically productive manner. Sometimes he lets them play equally important roles, other times he lets one dominate the other. His masterful understanding and control of the two very different

tools has contributed greatly to the success of the film.²⁵ I will now move on to another topographical location, which I think Minghella has displayed extraordinarily well; namely the desert.

The desert

Ext. The Sahara Desert. Late 1942.

Silence. The desert seen from the air. An ocean of dunes for miles after mile. The late sun turns the sand every colour from crimson to black and makes the dunes look like bodies pressed against each other.

An old aeroplane is flying over the Sahara. Its shadow swims over the contours of sand.

A woman's voice begins to sing – Szerelem, szerelem, she cries, in a haunting lament for her loved one. (Minghella 1997: 3, original emphases)

This is the opening scene of Minghella's screenplay: *The English Patient*. I would like to suggest that this scene very much represents a flavour, which characterizes Minghella's works as a director. His photo shots can (and should) be dwelled upon like photographs. Many of the photo shots of the desert focus on its choreography. The scenes are occupied with showing its beauty, its warm and reddish colour, its vastness, its curves that can easily be compared to the female body, and so forth. The film (more than the book) views the desert as something admirable. The photo shots apply human characteristics to the desert. I do not see the same personification in the book. It is described in a passionate language in the novel as well, but not in the same degree as in the film. When viewing the desert from the sky, it seems soft and tender. It makes you want to lie down in it. This could easily be applied to a description of a lover: his/her softness and tenderness embracing you. Minghella even goes as far as making a local describe it as looking like a woman's back. The parallelism is unmistakable.

²⁵ It has after all won 9 Oscars, including 'Best Film'.

The desert and Katharine are very much alike in the film. They are both warm, caring, and most of all dangerous. They both have a wild nature and a temper that easily switches without warning. In a way, Katharine's violent attitude (towards Almásy) can be compared to the animals of the desert. Like a scorpion she can turn around and sting him in the snatch of a second. Like a hyena she can bite and make him bleed. And just like the calm desert she can turn into a sandstorm, making all order into chaos. This becomes more evident in the film than in the book simply because their nature is shown to us on film. When we read, it takes some time before we consciously recognize any parallels. But when the camera moves from the desert to Katharine, their similarities become evident. One comparison is when Katharine's body is filmed as if it was the landscape of the desert. In a love scene the camera has focused on her throat and her shoulder. When she moves, the whiteness of her bones show through her skin and create valleys and hollows that could easily be mistaken for the landscape of the desert.

But film is not just a medium that shows or tells everything explicitly. It can easily emphasise the importance of something simply by holding back information. One way of keeping the spectators in the haze of ignorance is simply by not translating something said in a foreign language, or by blurring specific items or actions on the screen. Our curiosity will awake and we automatically search for a meaning, perhaps by applying certain values to the tone of their voice, their facial expressions, or the music of the scene. An example of the film avoiding explicitness is a scene where two characters are talking together in a language that is not translated. Almásy is having a conversation with one of the locals. He talks to Almásy of a mountainside shaped like a woman's back. This is supposedly where the Cave of Swimmers is located (which turns out to be true).

It's very bold, even today, to have an extended scene between two [...] characters in an English-language film speaking another language with no translation. As a result you're paying much more attention to *how* things are said and the body language

being used, and you're perceiving things in a very different way. You're listening to the *sound* of the language, not the meaning. (Ondaatje 2002:121, original emphases)

When one does not know what is being said, the only way to understand what the scene is about is to watch *how* they say it. One immediately starts to pay attention to the tone of the characters' voice and body language. Another result of not translating lines in a foreign language can be that the spectators pay more attention to the visual as well as the audible. Not only does the audience listen more attentively, but their attention is also drawn towards what actually happens. When the accessibility of meaningful sound is no longer present, the visible becomes enormously important. Our attention is always drawn towards what we can interpret and make sense of. Thus, a director's intention by leaving the spectators out of a conversation can be to draw attention to what is going on in the background.

Ext. Base Camp at Pottery Hill. Dusk.

Count Lazlo De Almásy, Hungarian explorer, squats with an ancient Arab who draws in the sand, talking some arcane dialect, scratching out a map. The old man stops speaking and scours the sky a beat or two before we or Almásy hear the faint noise of a plane. It's a bright yellow Steerman coming in to land. Almásy doesn't look up. The Arab continues to talk. The plane sweeps past the cluster of tents and camels and trucks which constitutes the Base Camp for a team of international explorers, led by Almásy and his colleague, Peter Madox. (Minghella 1997: 21)

This extract illustrates my point: a conversation we are not fully able to understand is replaced by a greater event; namely the arrival of Geoffrey and Katharine Clifton.

I will now move on to the commonplace book. This book can also be seen as a tool that introduces new fragments or flashbacks. There are numerous examples of the book being an introductory element that links the past with the present, something I will analyse further in the following subchapter. I will try to provide an account of *how* the commonplace book is used in the film.

The commonplace book

There are numerous descriptions of the commonplace book in Minghella's screenplay. The following is taken from the incident when the patient lies in bed. He accidentally drops the book to the floor, and his mind wanders off to the time he lived in the desert.

Int. The Patient's room. Day.

Close on the Herodotus. The Patient opens its cover, held together by leather ties. Loose papers, photographs, hand-drawn maps, and sketches are all collected between the charred pages. He claws at some papers, inspects a letter. Then he loses control of the papers and the whole parcel spills to the floor with a crack. (Minghella 1997: 21, original emphases)

I find the role of the commonplace book highly interesting. It is as present in the film as it is in the novel. However, the book plays a bigger role in the movie than it does in the novel. It is given a wider range of roles in the film. First of all, it is often used in the shifting of scenes. One example is when Almásy lies in his bed at the villa, looking at the book. The camera moves away from the patient and focuses on the book. When it backs up again the surroundings have changed and we are back in his memories. It is also used the other way around. We are in the past, the camera focuses on the book and again we are situated in the present.

Minghella does not just use the book as a physical object that connects the past and present. He also uses voice as a linking element. Almásy lets both Hana and Katharine read in the commonplace book. While they recite part of an extract, the voice will switch between them, bringing us into a different time, present or past. Hana's voice, reciting the book, transfers into the voice of Katharine several times in the film. Thus, the book becomes an element that binds location and time together as it is present in the desert as well as in the villa. At one stage Hana reads the story of Kandalus and Gyges. The voice of Katharine takes over and the camera flip-flops between them several times. This way both women become

present across the boundaries of time. The reciting of the commonplace book creates a linkage between Almásy's memories of the desert and his present life in the villa.

The characters are separated by time. Katharine and Geoffrey never meet Hana or Kip. Almásy is the only character who is present both in the desert and at the villa. An event of the past has made him unrecognisable. The commonplace book, however, is the only element that has made the transition from past to present without visible damage or change. It has become 'the missing link' that makes the many fragments of the film coherent, and at the same time the only element in the novel and film that has defied the restrictions of time. Its appearance is the same in the desert and at the villa, and its contents are unchanged. It is as if Almásy's plane-crash made time stop in relation to the book. The book ceased to evolve and grow as nothing more was added to it. It became a good read for Hana, a pool of memories for Almásy, a piece of evidence for Caravaggio, and a text in which to learn how to read for Kip. But more importantly: it became a tool for Minghella, which was suitable to show the parallels of time. Two women, one love; Hana and Katharine fall in love with the same texts, they recite the same paragraphs, they are both in love with one man, and neither can obtain peace within themselves during the course of the film and the novel. Such parallel characters are often found in novels that have both a frame narrative and story plot, or several separate stories put together. There is usually a connection between the different stories and the characters involved, as in *The English Patient* (Gaasland 1999: 101-102).

The commonplace book intrigues Hana and Katharine. They recite the texts within and read silently to themselves, they both look at the picture of Almásy as a chubby child, and so forth. But only Katharine adds something to it. She offers Almásy the paintings she made when copying the figures in the Cave of Swimmers.

Katharine: I thought you might like to paste them into your book.

Almásy: Well, we took photographs, there's no need.

Katharine: No really, I'd like you to have them.

Almásy (*handing them back*): Well, there is really no need. They're too good. This is just a scrapbook. I should feel obliged. Thank you.

Katharine (*exasperated*): And that would be unconscionable, I suppose, wouldn't it, to feel any obligation? Yes. Of course it would.

(Minghella 1997: 66, original emphases)

Katharine is really upset by this. However, after they almost die in a sandstorm Almásy says it would be an honour if she would paste it into his commonplace book. But Katharine adds something more to it. When she lies alone, dying, in the Cave of Swimmers she writes her last words in it. These words are read out loud with her and Hana's voice in the last scenes of the film. Hana reads to her patient for the last time as she, at his request, has given him an overdose. As she reads, Almásy sinks into the past; to the time he finally reached Katharine and carried her dead body into the plane. The audience can see his grief. His facial expression is of total devastation. Yet we do not hear his crying. Dramatic music is added and Katharine's voice takes over.

Hana (*reading*):

'My darling, I'm waiting for you. How long is a day in the dark? or a week? The fire is gone now and I'm horribly cold'.

The reading continues, but sometimes it's Katharine's own voice that's heard.

'I really ought to drag myself outside - but then there would be the sun. I'm afraid I waste the light on the paintings and on writing these words. We die, we die rich with lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed... bodies we have entered and swum up like rivers, fears we have hidden in like this wretched cave...'

Int. The Cave of Swimmers. Torchlight.

Almásy smudges Katharine's pale face with saffron from the thimble. He presses his cheek to hers, smooths her hair, with incredible tenderness.

Katharine (o/s)

... I want all this marked on my body. We're the real countries. Not the boundaries drawn on maps with the names of powerful men...

Ext. Cave of Swimmers. Day.

Almásy comes out of the cave, carrying the bundle of Katharine in his arms, wrapped in the silks of her parachute. He's shuddering in the throes of his grief, but there's no sound.

Katharine (o/s)

... I know you will come and carry me out into the palace of winds... That's all I've wanted - to walk in such a place with you, with friends, an earth without maps.

Int. The Patient's room. Day.

The Patient is slipping away as Hana reads the last of Katharine's message.

Hana

'The lamp has gone out... and I'm writing in the darkness.'

She looks up from the book. His eyes roll, his breathing quiets, then stops.
(Minghella 1997: 158-159, original emphases)

Her last words support Almásy's wish for a world without maps and ownership. These were things he despised the most. Katharine seems to have adopted his view as she is dying, watching the swimmers on the cave wall. She dies as a result of her infidelity towards her husband's loyalty, and because her lover did not have the right name at the outset of war. In other words, her death is caused by human perceptions of belonging and nationality, and all the customs and norms these terms may represent.

In chapter 3, I discussed the interesting aspect of including a physical book containing fragments within Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, which again is a book containing fragmented texts. Minghella carries on Ondaatje's tradition by including the same book in his film. While in the novel we have a book within a book we are now faced with a book within a film. Such blending results in the written word infiltrating film, which is normally perceived as a visual medium. The border of the film genre is blurred and allows the written word to become an essential part of the film. As mentioned earlier; the film is not just based on a screenplay; it is also based on a novel. Texts, fragments, and words are powerful modes of explanation. By letting such mighty elements infiltrate the film, it is able to show the vastness of words. Katharine indirectly dies because Almásy utters the wrong words when he finally reaches the Allies. Hana is devastated by the simple words 'He bought it. Yesterday. Shot to bits' (Minghella 1997: 8). I believe it is impossible to transfer all the powerful abilities of words within film. Sometimes the written word has to be included in film in order to express the intended notion. Minghella lets words play a larger part than many other directors as he places a lot of meaning and functions into the commonplace book. He even passes the commonplace book on to another adventure that is not told off in his film, only indicated.

Int. The Patient's room. Day.

Hana lingers in the empty room. The mattress stripped bare. No signs of their stay.
Caravaggio (o/s): Hana, come on! Hana!
Hana makes to leave, then sees the Herodotus, lying on the bedside cabinet, and scoops it up. (Minghella 1997: 160, original emphases)

The commonplace book will continue to play a role in Hana's life, as she takes it with her to Florence. She will still read it and let others read in it. Perhaps, this time, *she* will add some thoughts or observations in the margin. In the 1890 edition of *The Histories*, Almásy's words will forever exist side by side with Herodotus's. People may cease to live, and they will only be remembered for as long as those who knew them continue to live. Words, however, can exist for an eternity. The inclusion of the commonplace book could be seen as a tribute to the written word both by Ondaatje and Minghella. It represents the written word, which both the screenplay and the film is based upon.

One concluding observation through the discussion of space is that space is a literary and cinematic element that *has* to be created differently. The reason for this is that the two media influence the reader and the spectator in different ways. Writing and film affect us differently. We have to use our eyes in order to watch a film and read a book, but while film presents already made pictures to us, reading makes us create these pictures within ourselves. In the process of reading we become active participants as we create pictures in our mind. But this does not mean that we are just passive onlookers when watching a film. Many elements of film need to be analysed and interpreted, elements that could be stated explicitly in books.

I feel it is appropriate to move on to the concluding chapter of this thesis. I will do so by summarising the main points made in the previous chapters. I will also make a last examination and comparison of the three spaces analysed in chapters 1 – 4: the villa, the desert, and the commonplace book. It is important to see them in the light of Ondaatje's novel and Minghella's film, as they are all similar, yet also differing, features in the two separate works of art.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

This thesis has dealt with issues concerning fiction and film. I chose to focus on the role of space within Ondaatje's novel and Minghella's film: *The English Patient*. I have aimed to discuss how the two distinctly different media present the concept of space. As space *has* to be executed differently within writing and film, I found it necessary to examine *how* space was created in the two distinct media. In this process, I also found it relevant to discuss the *use* of space. It was interesting to explore the function of space as it contains many important aspects that affect the reader, the viewer, the protagonists, and the narrator. I have chosen to focus on three main areas of space: the Villa San Girolamo, the desert, and the commonplace book. This choice enabled me to compare any findings in one chapter to that of the others. By analysing the same locations in the book as in the film it is easier to see any distinctions or similarities between the use and effects of space. Different techniques in the creation of space also become more apparent. Another reason for choosing these topographical and metaphorical locations is that I found them of immense importance in the book as well as in the film. I believe they function as key spaces in both works of art.

As opposed to time, topographical space denotes something material. Even metaphorical space is represented through something visible. Despite such physical appearance, space proved to be a vague phenomenon. Such vagueness makes it difficult to give a concise conclusion. Space is a significantly comprehensive term. An analysis of the term involved innumerable subjects. I chose to focus on the issues that were relevant to *The English Patient* and its adaptation. I will shortly summarize the main findings of my discussion of space in the novel and film, starting with the Villa San Girolamo.

The villa is the location of the story frame in both works of art. This is where everything takes place and where all flashbacks are triggered. The protagonists I find of

greatest interest are all situated at the villa.²⁶ This is the area where we, as spectators or readers, are able to see them interact and reveal aspects of themselves. More attention is given to the villa in the novel than in the film. This means that Ondaatje has applied an equally (if not more) important value to the relationship between Hana and Kip as to that of Almásy and Katharine. The major difference between the book and film, when it comes to the characters involved, is the time assigned to Kip. His role is severely reduced in the film, since too many differing fragments would make the narrative confusing for the spectator. This results in a strong postcolonial aspect being lost in the film. Another consequence of the absence of Kip's complex character is a reduction of time spent on life at the villa. It becomes secondary to what takes place in Cairo and the desert.

When analysing the villa, I found it inevitable not to touch upon the parallels between the state of the villa and that of the characters. It seems as if the characters and their surroundings mirror each other's condition. Following this string of thoughts, I found it natural to comment on the architecture of the villa and draw a parallel to modern architecture. In this discussion I referred to Bhaba and his theory on liminal space. This in-between space affects the characters greatly and proves to be a confusing factor in their struggle in locating their identity. Ondaatje and Minghella use the architecture of the villa to mirror the condition of the characters. The villa has an open and inclusive space with no clear-cut borders. Such a sense of the inside crossing over into the outside can be compared to modern architecture, and especially to the works of Geir Grung. It brings the residents closer to nature and vice versa. This both lead to a harmonic atmosphere and the possibility of nature penetrating the 'walls of safety'. The *trompe l'oeil* of the villa reinforces the sense of the garden entering the villa. The difference between modern architecture and the villa is that the villa has a blurred borderline between outside – inside non-intentionally. Grung's idea of a free state of being

²⁶ I have also given some attention to Katharine, who is only present in Almásy's narrative of the desert and in Cairo.

does not apply to the villa, as it is still an area troubled by the aftermath of war. However, this restrictive notion changes during the course of the narrative. The atmosphere of the villa becomes more positive towards the end of both the novel and film.

The theme of identity becomes an important aspect when discussing the space of the villa. The damaged villa reflects the character's fragile lives and mind. It is an issue all the protagonists are occupied with. It was interesting to analyse how the characters struggle with finding and creating a space for themselves, a space where they can heal their traumas and move on with their lives. I find Hana's approach significant, the way she makes everyone dependent on her. She enters a role in order to feel needed and suppress her own suffering. She is a fragment that longs for a whole.

The Saharan desert has always been a landscape of great mystique and interest for me, as I have lived on the border of its eastern out spring: Cairo. It is breathtaking in its vastness, and exotic in its appearance. It is almost impossible to describe it with words. That is how much of an impression it makes on people that are foreign to such landscape. To the human mind it becomes sublime. This is why it is a considerable achievement of Ondaatje to actually captivate such indescribable scenery into words. The desert is as beautiful in the novel as it is in the film. But due to the power of visualization, it is even more sublime and breathtaking in the film than in the novel. In just one shot we are presented its vastness, its feminine side as a curved and soft landscape, and its dangerous and unpredictable side. The desert (and the love scenes between Almásy and Katharine) always appears in a warm sandy-colored haze. This is done to emphasize the intimacy and express the unspoken passion between Almásy, Katharine, and the desert. Minghella has a unique capability of permeating so many levels of meaning and information through his shots. It would take several volumes to express the same in words.

Almásy's life in the desert plays an important part of the film and the book. The nomadic aspect of the desert proved to be closely associated with his character. Almásy is a wandering character who does not approve of human-made rules of borders and nations. He has a passion towards the desert. He has learned its nature, gotten acquainted with the indigenous people of the area, and to a certain extent he also adapted their lifestyle. The nomads save him as they see him as a resourceful and knowledgeable person. He can even speak the local language. Almásy's way of life is derailed as he lets Katharine enter his world. She makes him realize that belonging and ownership are a natural part of human life. The free and borderless understanding he has of the desert, and which he has adopted as a lifestyle, becomes a huge contrast to these new rules and norms introduced to him by Katharine. His relationship to her makes him realize that the ideological concept of a world free of nations and ownership is not applicable to the real world.

The never-ending landscape of the desert makes it logical to include the theme of borders. I have examined how this reflects the characters and the novel itself. There are numerous elements that represent borders in the novel. The characters at the villa are restricted by the aftermath of war; there is a constant threat of mines, and they lack food and water. Yet there are also various boundary-breaking elements that can be found throughout the novel and the film. Images of water and metaphors that break down borders flow into every part of the story. Such elements create a notion of hope and optimism in the work of Ondaatje and Minghella. Another space that makes the question of borders very interesting is Almásy's edition of *The Histories*.

The commonplace book has a very different role than that of the topographical spaces of the villa and the desert. I have chosen to focus on the metaphorical aspect of the book, as it is a space of texts with fragmented contents and a space of both Herodotus and Almásy. There is a battle between them. Almásy seems to conquer the space inside the book by

including his own words and placing them over those of Herodotus. When analysing the book as such a metaphorical space, it became inevitable not to touch upon the way it has undergone a process of deterritorialization. The commonplace book is a physical object, yet it contains a never-ending space of texts, fragments, and intertextuality. It has a borderless appearance as it includes many genres. Its fragmented texts consist of a blend of genres and functions. Herodotus' text can only be read in-between Almásy's texts. As a result: *The Histories* has become a fragment, as Almásy has taken more and more of its original space.

The English Patient is a work containing many stories. It can be divided into many fragments that create a whole when put together. This further enhances the significance of the commonplace book, which is constructed in the same way. The commonplace book and Ondaatje's novel; *The English Patient*, represent literary self-consciousness. They are both complex works with several textual features in common. They both contain narrative variants as analepsis and prolepsis, resulting in a space of the past and a space of the future. However, the function of the commonplace book is slightly different in the novel than in the film, as it cannot be seen. We are told of the book, how Almásy is led into a chain of thoughts and memories by reading or watching it. But we do not *see* it. On the other hand, we know that different parts of the book trigger Almásy's mind, hence *he* becomes the linking element of the different sections in the novel, as opposed to the book itself in the film.

Ondaatje and Minghella both needed a tool they could use in order to make such jumping in time seem natural and logical. The commonplace book, with its miscellaneous contents, was their solution. It is a tool that easily binds location and time together. Minghella uses the commonplace book as a cinematic tool to make the continuous shifting of scenes coherent. He uses its appearance as a physical object that connects the different scenes. He also employs it as a source to let audible sound of reciting connect the different scenes, as he more than once has Hana's voice take over the voice of Katharine (and vice

versa). A result of having the book function as a tool that switches settings and introduces new scenes is that it becomes an element that makes it possible to jump back and forth in time. The commonplace book is a vehicle that breaks the boundaries of time. This becomes very important in the novel and in the film, as neither has a chronological story.

Ondaatje includes a book within the book, while Minghella includes a book within the film. This results in the written word infiltrating film. It blurs the borders of the film genre, thus allows the written word to become an essential part of the film. By including the commonplace book, Minghella follows Ondaatje's tradition of showing and exploring the vastness of words.

As examined earlier, the transition of a literary text to film creates a film language. A result of the translation between the language of prose and film is the impossibility of making the film an echo of the text it is based on. 'Words and phrases' of the novel are non-existent in the film and vice versa. Thus, there will always be differences between a book and its adaptation. First of all, film communicates feelings differently to that of a literary text. The visual screen of the cinema has an easy access to our emotions, more so than writing. Film uses manipulative effects, such as sound and music, in order to affect us. Sound is also used in order to prepare the audience for a shifting of scenes. Secondly, while freezing all action creates space in literature, film has a need for progression. Hence, movement and action are included in the space of film. As discussed earlier, the two-dimensional screen makes the use of mise-en-scene necessary in order to enable the audience to infer with the three-dimensionality of the scene. Movement, difference in color, shading, balancing, and variation in size are some elements that create depth cues, which enhances the apparent volume of the screen. Being a visual media, film also has unique opportunity to place and convey meaning through the different characters' facial expressions, body posture, the choreography of landscape, and so forth.

As we have seen, space in *The English Patient* and its adaptation is used and created differently. The space of the Villa San Girolamo is also the narrative frame. More attention is given to the narrative frame in the novel than in the film. As a result, the film loses the novel's postcolonial aspect, as Kip's role at the villa is significantly reduced. Both the novel and the film use space to mirror the condition of the characters. Architecture and the *trompe l'oeil* become relevant issues in regard to such parallelism. Identity proved to be highly relevant when examining space. The characters seem to seek a space where they can heal their traumas and move on. As discussed earlier, the desert too is a significant space relevant to *The English Patient*. Its nomadic aspect and lack of borders are highly relevant issues of the book and film. Boundary-braking elements are found throughout the two works. The commonplace book is a metaphorical space that also seems to lack borders as it has undergone a process of deterritorialization. It contains innumerable fragments and its inclusion of several genres makes it a symbol of intertextuality. It is also literary self-conscious in the way it reflects upon literature and includes narrative features such as ellipsis, analepsis, and prolepsis.

Space, in Minghella's adaptation, is created in a number of different ways. As topographical spaces within the novel have been transferred to the film, depth cues have been used in order to translate these spaces into film language. This has resulted in necessary cinematic solutions; hence the film is not just a faithful echo to the original novel. The commonplace book perfectly fulfils the role of an item that links the changing of scenes. By having multiple people read in and from the book, and at the same time shuffle the background back and forth, the commonplace book becomes a tool that interlinks the different spaces and underlines the parallels of both time and space.

After reading the novel and seeing the film for the first time I was not aware of the degree of its richness and complexity. Only through an examination and discussion can one

obtain such insight of its supremacy. I chose to concentrate on the concept of space, and, as I have analysed this aspect of *The English Patient*, I have come across several topics that could be interesting for further research. One such topic is time. This is a topic closely related to space, and I feel a study of this aspect would make the picture of *The English Patient* more complete. But even if someone takes up this challenge, an examination of the novel and the film will never be complete. It can be compared to a kaleidoscope: the reflections of its colored glass will change and create innumerable patterns as one responds to and aims to understand *The English Patient* and its adaptation from different angles.

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